An Investigation of the Career Decision Making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school.

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Declaration

The author declares that this thesis is entirely her own work. No element of the work described in this declaration has been previously submitted for any degree in University of Limerick, or in any other institution

Signed:_____

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Glossary

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
ASTI	Association of Secondary School Teachers
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DE	Department of Education (1921 – 1997)
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science (1997 – 2010)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (2010 – Present)
EC	European Commission
ESRI	Economic and Social Protection
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
ISSU	Irish Second Level Students Union
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NCC	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NGF	National Guidance Forum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
SEC	State Examination Commission

SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
TY	Transition Year
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admission Service
WSA	Whole School Approach

Abstract

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the Career Decision Making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school. As students prepare to progress from post primary school, they face many decisions in relation to courses, colleges and future options. These decisions may have long term consequences with research highlighting that information about the higher education entry process, courses, subjects, interests and aptitudes been central to a successful transition (Smyth et al., 2011).

Having examined existing literature and other published material on the key factors that influence students with respect to their career decisions process, the researcher noticed certain elements that impact on a student's decision-making process. A post positivist approach was employed by the researcher (Gray, 2014), which involved surveying 87 fourth and fifth year post primary students in a rural DEIS school, using an online questionnaire.

The key finding suggests that parents play a very significant role in the life of a student and especially in their career decision making process. The research also highlights the influence of the regular teacher and the provision of guidance counselling as important elements in the decision-making process for students in a rural DEIS school. A distinct finding of this study is that students access a multiple range of sources to inform their choices. A number of recommendations are provided at the end of the dissertation based on these overall findings.

To conclude, this research study can enhance the existing body of research that exists in relation to the decision-making process of Senior Cycle students and recommendations are made to inform future policy, practice and research.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the topic under investigation in this research. It outlines the context and justification for the research, along with the positionality of the researcher. The aim, objectives and the methodology of the research will also be outlined and a structured plan of this thesis will be presented.

1.1 Context and Justification of the Research Study

This research investigates the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school. The senior cycle and the transition from post primary to either higher or further education, the labour market or training, is an exciting time but one which most young people find difficult for many factors, including uncertainty, stress or concern about future regret (Perez and Gati, 2016). Informed decision-making is crucial for senior cycle students where lack of preparation and guidance has serious implications for future pathways and choices (Smyth et al., 2011). The importance of high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance is essential in post primary education, preparing young people for further education or the world of work (Haynes et al., 2013). Research has shown that young people from a disadvantaged socio-economic background are less likely to engage in higher education where a lack of accurate information, supports, and eligibility can be problematic (Mc Coy and Byrne, 2011).

Furthermore, students' knowledge about decision making and the concept of self develops through their interaction with those around them (Barnes et al., 2011). Erickson (1968) highlights that major choices are made during adolescence, when young people are experiencing an identity crisis in their transition from childhood to adulthood. The decision-making process can be influenced by many factors, such as socio-economic background, personal development, level of maturity and external influences (Boyd and Bee, 2015). In addition, these career related decisions are sometimes being made without proper consultation with school guidance counsellors and possibly accompanied by stress and anxiety, which are important factors to bear in mind (Hearne et al., 2016). Students report that Post Leaving Certificate regrets about career pathways relate back to decisions made at senior cycle (Mc Coy et al., 2014). Therefore, the provision of appropriate guidance is essential during this crucial period of development (NCCA, 2007).

However, Education cutbacks in Budget 2012 resulted in post primary schools losing their ex quota guidance hours (Hearne et al., 2016b). Since then guidance counselling has been included within the school's teacher allocation, at the discretion of the school management (DES, 2012). The focus of this study is on the decision-making process and the implications for guidance service. Changes in the provision of guidance in post primary schools nationally has had an impact on the service provided to students (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Hearne et al., 2016). This possibly has an impact on students living in rural locations who do not have the same access to facilities and resources that their urban counterparts may have.

A central role of the guidance counsellor is to provide educational and career guidance to students during transitional periods of their lives (IGC, 2008). Career guidance helps students to engage in essential educational choices and focuses on helping students develop the necessary self-responsibility and career management skills (Hearne et al., 2016). Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in particular DEIS students, rely on the post primary guidance service to provide them with accurate information on which to base decisions (Smyth et al., 2011). The guidance counsellor, therefore, has an essential role in the delivery of a range of learning opportunities, including the decision-making process, for students to develop these vital skills within a whole school approach to guidance provision (Hearne et al., 2017). A whole school approach to guidance has become established policy in Ireland whereby schools collaboratively deliver a guidance service in support of the needs of students (DES, 2012; NCGE, 2004). This study sets out to examine how students from a rural background in one DEIS school make career related decisions.

1.2 Positionality of the Researcher

The positionality of the researcher is a significant element of the study (Thomas, 2013). A single case study of one DEIS post primary school in rural Ireland was selected for this inquiry. The researcher's involvement in pastoral events within the school, the Career Guidance Service and career related initiatives led to her interest in the decision-making process of students. Gaining a better understanding of the needs of students will inform her future guidance practice and help to facilitate students in making informed career decisions.

During the research the researcher worked as a teacher in a DEIS post primary school and a trainee guidance counsellor. Throughout the research the researcher took time to acknowledge their own position and bias, through reflexivity, ensuring the validity of the research piece (Thomas, 2013).

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Research

The main aim of this research was to examine how Senior Cycle students from a rural DEIS school make career related decisions for their future.

The research objectives were:

1. To review existing literature relevant to Irish post-primary education, policy and practice of guidance counselling in Irish post-primary education and the career decision-making process of Senior Cycle students.
2. To collect and analyse, through an online questionnaire, the views and experiences of fourth and fifth-year students in a rural DEIS school with regards to their decision-making process.
3. To examine the main influencing factors that impact on student's decision making, from the findings.
4. To identify recommendations for future research related to guidance counselling in post primary schools.

1.4 Research Methodology

The research study has been underpinned by a post positivist paradigm (Gray 2014). The use of this paradigm allowed the researcher to collect objective quantifiable numerical data through an online questionnaire which was completed by n87 fourth and fifth-year students in a rural DEIS post primary school. The quantitative data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), imported into Microsoft Excel and converted to graphical form. All qualitative data gathered was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. At all times, the research was conducted in accordance with the ethical requirements of the University of Limerick Faculty of Education and Health Sciences

Research Ethics committee, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors Code of Ethics (2012 and the National Centre for guidance in Education (2008) Research Code of Ethics.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One introduces the research topic and identifies the primary aim and objectives. It sets out the context and justification of the research and describes the positionality of the researcher within the study. The methodology of the research is examined, and this chapter concludes with a structured plan of the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Literature review provides a critical review of the existing literature on the topic under investigation. It is presented in three sections; the first section gives an overview of the Irish post primary educational system; the second section examines the policy and practice of guidance counselling in post primary education. The third section examines the theoretical perspectives on career development and the key influencers in the decision-making process.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The methodology chapter provides a justification for the research methodology chosen. It outlines the research process, including the data collection instrument and analysis. In addition, it outlines the validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical issues associated with the study.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the primary research through a discussion of the dominant themes that emerged from the data.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the overall findings in the context of existing literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The final chapter provides a conclusion to the research study. It examines the extent to which the research has achieved the initial aim and objectives. It also outlines the strengths and limitations of the study and proposes a number of recommendations for future policy, practice and research. The chapter finishes with reflexivity in relation to the researchers learning during the research process.

Chapter Two will provide a critical detailed examination of literature relevant to the research topic.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The following sections aim to critically examine literature related to the Career Decision process of fourth- and fifth-year students in post primary education. This literature review examined Irish and International policy documents, academic journals, research reports, education documents, documents from guidance counselling representatives' bodies and internet-based articles and documents. The first section presents an overview of the Irish educational system focusing on Irish policy on DEIS Secondary Schools and Transition Year. The second section will discuss the role of the guidance counsellor in supporting the decision-making process and finally the third section will discuss the key influencers in the decision-making process for Senior Cycle students.

2.1. An Overview of the Irish Post Primary Educational System

The Irish Education System comprises three stages, primary, secondary, and third level. Primary school is from the ages of 4 to 12 followed by secondary level or post primary school (Smyth, 2018). Education is compulsory for students to age 16 or until students complete three years in post primary education (DES, 2019b). Post primary consists of secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. There are 374 Secondary, 245 Vocational and 96 Community and Comprehensive Schools in Ireland (DES 2019b). Secondary schools are owned and managed privately, Vocational schools are administered by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), while Community and Comprehensive schools are managed by Boards of Management (DES, 2019b). All schools are state funded, follow the same state prescribed curriculum and take the same state public examinations (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). The Education Act 1998 provides the statutory basis for the education system, while DES has the statutory responsibility for implementation, including funding (Government of Ireland, 1998). The Act recognises the autonomy of each school under its patron and sets out responsibilities and rights of the patron, board of management and the principal, subject to ministerial regulations (Darmody and Smyth, 2013).

Secondary education consists of a three-year programme followed by nationally standardised examinations, the Junior Certificate (Smyth and Banks, 2012). This programme is currently being replaced with a new framework with new subjects and short courses and a focus on literacy, numeracy, key skills, and new approaches to assessment and reporting (NCCA, 2019). The Senior Cycle, 15 to 18 years, includes an optional Transition Year and a two-year Leaving Certificate programme concluding with the nationally standardised Leaving Certificate Examination (Smyth and Banks, 2012). To cater for a range of abilities and interests the Department of Education restructured the Leaving Certificate in the 1980's and established, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Heraty et al., 2000). The LCVP follows the traditional programme with five mainstream subjects and two 'link modules' on enterprise education and preparation for the world of work (Smyth, 2016). The LCA programme is stand-alone for students who have difficulty with the traditional Leaving Certificate, offering a combination of continuous and exam-based assessment (Smyth, 2016). The majority (93%) who complete the senior cycle are eligible for higher education and "other routes open to school leavers including Post – Leaving Certificate (PLC) (further education) courses, apprentices, other state training schemes, a 'gap year' and paid employment" (Smyth and Banks, 2012 p.266).

The established Leaving Certificate offers subjects at higher and ordinary level (Herne and Galvin,2014; Smyth, 2016) and grades achieved determine access to higher education and to employment (Smyth, 2018). Points are awarded for grades in the best six subjects (Leahy et al., 2017). Applicants for courses are ranked by points gained, with the highest-ranking candidates offered a college place (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Smyth and Banks, 2012a).

2.1.1 Irish Policy on DEIS Secondary Schools

The focus of this study is the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) system, which is the main policy initiative of the Department of Education and Skills to tackle educational disadvantage (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018). The Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (DAS), 1984, was introduced by the Department of Education to address disadvantage and schools were assessed on economic and educational indicators (DES, 2019b). Successful applicants received extra funding and reduced pupil teacher ratios. The

scheme was extended in 1990 and the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator was introduced. In 1995, the specific term "educational disadvantage" emerged in the *White Paper in Education, Charting our Education Future* (DES, 1995; Smyth and Hannan,2000), and the Education Act 1998 Section 32(9) (Government of Ireland, 1998). In 2005, the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), Action Plan for Education Inclusion* was introduced and set out on "improving the path of educational opportunity for those who come to education at a disadvantage" (DES, 2017, p.4). The DEIS Action Plan addressed the disadvantage experienced by families by providing additional supports to schools (DES, 2005a) including additional funding, reduced pupil teacher ratios, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), schoolbook grants, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Co-ordinator and additional guidance posts (DES, 2005a). DEIS schools differ significantly in terms of the social class, background, parental education, household income and family structures of students (Smyth et al., 2015).

The DES Action Plan promotes progression to higher education, as a way of breaking down barriers for disadvantaged groups (Smyth et., al 2015). Even though a recent evaluation of DEIS revealed that the education gap between pupils in post-primary schools in disadvantaged communities and others has narrowed, a significant gap still remains(Weir and Kavanagh, 2018).This evaluation of DEIS in 2018, revealed a narrowing of the achievement and attainment gap between DEIS and Non DEIS schools in terms of overall performance scores in state exams (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018). Likewise, this report also revealed an upward trend (1% increase per annum) in Senior Cycle retention rates. However, while it is acknowledged that inequalities exist "it is important to continue to provide educational programmes such as DEIS to address the needs of our most marginalised students"(Weir and Kavanagh, 2018, p. 25).

2.1.3 Transition Year Policy and Practice

The Transition Year Programme (TYP) is viewed as a bridge between the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes (Clerkin, 2019; DES, 1993; Lewis and Kellaghan, 1987;). It is an "optional, one-year, stand-alone, full-time programme" (Jeffers, 2010, p.470) for ages 15 to 16. TY programme provision has expanded significantly following

mainstreaming in 1994 (Clerkin, 2013: Smyth et al., 2011). The emphasis is on students developing and maturing educationally, personally and socially, including experiences of adult and working life (Smyth et al., 2011; Clerkin, 2013; Clerkin, 2019; Smyth, 2018). TY provides an opportunity for schools to design TY programmes for the needs, interests and skills of their students, with many schools offering subject sampling (Clerkin, 2012: ISSU, 2014: Clerkin, 2019) as recommended by the DES (2009)

Subject sampling is a major benefit associated with the TY programme (Smyth et al., 2004: Smyth et al., 2011: Clerkin, 2018) and provides the opportunity to try out new subjects which students may not have studied before (Smyth and Darmody, 2009), increasing their awareness of subjects and career choices (Smyth et al., 2004; Clerkin 2018). As the lack of planning and preparation can be a source of stress for students facing into their Senior Cycle (Banks and Smyth, 2015), TY allows students to address uncertainty by exploring subject choice and career options, in the absence of examination pressure (Clerkin, 2018). Other benefits of TY include building good student-teacher relationships, creation of positive attitudes, increased self-awareness, maturity and confidence, and knowledge of future career possibilities (Jeffers, 2011). This knowledge of subjects and self, together with the experience and results of the Junior Certificate, enables TY students to make informed educational decisions and prepare for adult life (ISSU, 2014: Clerkin 2019).

Additionally, TY work experience provides students with an understanding of the world of work and learning beyond the classroom (Smyth et al., 2011). It gives students the opportunity to be treated as responsible adults with the social interactions of the workplace regarded as important learning skills (ISSU, 2014: Smyth et al., 2011). It can change students' minds about possible options after school (Smyth et al., 2011, p191) and provide a focus on specific career paths which may assist in the choice of Leaving Certificate subjects (ISSU, 2014). However, in rural Ireland, the availability of work experience can be problematic with the range of workplaces limited compared to urban areas (Jeffers, 2011, ISSU, 2014). For students who have limited options, or make poor selections, research has shown that significant learning will take place in the workplace nonetheless (Moynihan, 2017).

Since 1994 TY provision has increased and participation rates in 2017/2018 indicate that TY is being offered in 664 schools accounting for 40,451 students (PDST, 2019). However, increased costs associated with TY, for parents and school management may be particularly relevant in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage. Research has shown that 52% of schools serving disadvantaged students are less likely to run a TY programme, with boys less likely to take part in the extra year compared to boys in non-disadvantaged schools (Clerkin, 2013). Therefore, strong and committed leadership from principals, coordinators and core staff is essential for the success of the programme (Jeffers, 2010).

2.2 Guidance Counselling in the Irish Post primary Sector

This section will critically discuss the role of guidance counselling in supporting students in their career decision making process.

2.2.1 Definition of Guidance Counselling

Internationally, guidance counselling plays a vital role in helping people acquire the skills needed when making life decisions and during periods of transition (OECD, 2004). Guidance is promoted as a lifelong practice which can vary from country to country and is linked to evidence-based practice principles (Hooley, 2014). It consists of

> a range of activities that enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competencies and interests; make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and / or used.
>
> European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network 2013, p.13)

The Irish model of guidance counselling is holistic and integrated, incorporating personal/social, educational and career guidance and advocates the involvement of the whole school and the wider community (DES, 2005a; Hearne and Galvin, 2014). Guidance counselling enables students to develop the skills to assist in making effective choices and decisions (DES 2005a; 2005b; 2009). The provision of whole school guidance counselling is a statutory requirement (Government of Ireland, 1998; DES, 2005b), and places direct responsibility on schools to provide guidance to students:

> A recognised school shall use its available resources to –(c) ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.

(Government of Ireland, 1998, p.13)

However, the definition of appropriate guidance is unclear and continues to be problematic in Irish schools (Hearne et al., 2016), with the OECD) stating that "no definition exists of what appropriate guidance should be" (2002, p.9). The guidance counselling services offered in Irish post primary education are delivered in two separate entities, namely guidance and counselling (DES, 2016). The DES (2005b) defines guidance as:

> A range of learning experiences that assist students to develop self-management skills that will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. Guidance encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance.
>
> (DES, 2005b, p.4)

The counselling part of the role is seen as an essential "key part" of the guidance service which is offered as "developmental learning process and at moments of crisis" (DES, 2005, p.4). The objective is:

> empowerment of students so that they can make decisions, solve problems, address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing. Counselling in schools may include personal counselling, educational counselling, career counselling or combinations of these.
>
> (DES 2005b p.4)

Finally, the National Guidance Forum (NGF, 2007) describes guidance counselling as a lifelong process that supports:

> people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they reach their potential and contribute to the development of a better society.
>
> (NGF, 2007, p.6)

2.2.1 Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

Guidance is seen as a "school wide responsibility, involving the collaboration of school administration, the guidance counsellor and other teachers" (DES, 1992, p.107). Watkins (1994) describes the whole school model as one that recognises, clarifies, communicates and coordinates each of the parts of guidance through collaboration and collegiality at ground level. A whole school approach (WSA) recognises there is a curricular element to

guidance which can be delivered by teachers, and by collaboration amongst staff (IGC, 2008). Post Budget 2012, the WSA is viewed as established policy, even though service provision has been less than uniform (Hearne et al., 2016: IGC, 2016).

However, the WSA to guidance is a complex process involving many stakeholders (Lam and Hu, 2010) and is seen as a "model of good practice" (Hearne and Galvin, 2014), integrating into all school programmes and permeating every aspect of school life (DES, 2005b, 2017). The "quality of the WSA to guidance counselling currently being delivered relies on the altruism and commitment of staff" (Galvin, 2012, p.79). However, Budget 2012 had a negative impact on regular teachers' commitment towards the WSA to guidance provision, with many teachers not always feeling involved in the WSA or seeing its relevance to them (Hearne and Galvin 2014; Hearne et al., 2017). The provision of whole school guidance therefore varies (Hearne et al., 2016; IGC 2016), with research showing that one third of Principals hold inadequate knowledge of WSA and guidance counselling issues (Keating, 2014).

A key element of whole school guidance counselling is the development of a yearly whole school Guidance Plan (DES, 2005b). This plan includes aims, objectives, resources, target groups, activities, and the review process (NCGE 2004). It contains sequential activities organised and implemented collaboratively by management, guidance counsellors, staff, parents and students (DES, 2005b, 2009, 2012; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; NCGE 2004) in supporting the needs of the students. However, there is a lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of post primary schools adopting a WSA to guidance counselling (Hearne et al., 2016b; Hearne and Galvin, 2014).

2.2.2Role of the Guidance Counsellor

A key role of the school guidance counsellor is to "assist students in the development of self- management skills to enable them to make more effective decisions and choices in their lives" (DES, 2005b, p.4). Guidance counsellors are active agents in helping students develop a sense of career readiness (Gysbers, 2013) and provide meaning to individuals, allowing them to get a fuller sense of their future choices (Sharf, 2010). They help identify strengths, skills, possibilities and options available to students so they can make informed choices relating to personal, social, education and vocational concerns (IGC, 2017). They

provide, counselling, personal and social contexts, assessment, education, content specific practice, vocational and professionalism (IGC, 2017). Guidance counsellors guide and support the process of decision making at key times but especially in applications for CAO, PLC, apprenticeships, UCAS and EUNICAS(NCGE.2019).

According to DES (2012) schools should provide guidance to assist students in their decision-making from first to sixth year. However, the removal of ex-quota guidance counselling hours from schools in Budget 2012 resulted in a lack of guidance provision to students (Hearne et al., 2016b) leading to the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher (Hearne et al., 2016a; 2016b). There was a 53.5% reduction in one to one service and a 13% increase in classroom timetabled provision of (Hearne, 2016b). In DEIS schools, the service has been reduced by 30% overall (IGC,2016). Service provision tends to lean more towards Senior Cycle to prepare for life after school thus reducing the service provided to junior years (Hearne et al., 2016b), however since 2012, 500 guidance posts have been reinstated with the allocation of these posts at the discretion of school management (IGC, 2019).

In rural Ireland the role of the guidance counsellor is viewed as unique, compared to urban communities, with many challenges including a lack of resources, reduced employment opportunities, and poverty (Morrison, 2011). The lack of broadband provision is a major challenge (Weckler, 2016) as the lack of efficient coverage affects business and employment prospects impacting on job opportunities for students (Calnan, 2017). The rural guidance counsellor must engage in a range of activities inside and outside the classroom and relies on the collaboration of all stakeholders to meet the needs of students (Morrison, 2011). Student success may depend on the guidance counsellor dealing with a range of issues from career and college preparation, to personal hygiene, anger management, and many more (Morrison, 2011). Provconik et al., (2007) report a greater collaboration between home and school in rural areas compared with urban counterparts, with more parents attending school events and volunteering compared to urban areas. Also, rural parents are more active in supporting and encouraging education through educational activities and materials within the home (Weir and McAvinue, 2013). This collaboration between home school and students is essential in tackling the educational challenges in rural areas (Harmon, 2017).

2.3. Career Decision - Making Process for Senior Students

This section provides an examination of the relationship between career theories adolescent development and the process of career decision

2.3.1Theoretical perspectives on career development and decision-making

Many theories have been developed to explain adolescent's decision-making processes. Watts et al. (1996, p.23) articulates that "career theory is a source of guidance strategies and techniques and can offer a rational for guidance to those who control its destiny". The range of theories available to practitioners helps to inform their practice, in the provision of career guidance and support during the turbulent time of adolescent transitions. In 1990 Parson developed the first conceptual framework for career decision- making, out of which came the career development theory. His theory comprised of three key factors in making career choices (1) self-understanding (2) knowledge of occupations and (3) the ability to draw relationships between them. Parsons believed that if an individual possessed these three attributes then they would make appropriate career choices for themselves but also, he believed there would be an added benefit to society in matching people to occupations (Sharf, 2010). Even though this framework is still used today under the title of the Trait and Factor theory of career Development. A lot of changes have taken place in society since the early 20th Century and Savickas et al. (2009, p.2), reports that "the core concepts of 20th Century career theories and vocational guidance techniques must be reformulated to fit the post- modern economy". Parsons theory was expanded by Holland (1959) in his person Environment Fit Theory. This theory proposes that most people resemble six personality types: Realistic, Investigative, artistic, social, Enterprising and Conventional (RIASEC), (Nauta,2010). In this theory career choice and career adjustment "represents and extension of a person's personality" (Sharf 2011, p.129). career instruments like Career Interest Inventory compliment Holland's Theory which together find occupations for people that fit their interests. By using this method of career exploration guidance counsellors help narrow the exploration process for students and allow exposure to possible careers that match their interests. Kidd (2006) however considers this approach to be over simplified and stresses that guidance counsellors must remember that it does not always guarantee a fit due to changing environments, people and maturity. The trait and factor theory is considered the "simplest and least sophisticated career development theory

that provides few guidelines for counsellors" (Sharf 2013, p.433). Despite this, this theory is still considered the most influential model of vocational choice making that is currently in existence (Brown, 2002).

Super's Lifespan Career Development Theory (1957) proposes that career development proceeds through five stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline (Inkson et al.2015) which are generally age related (Sharf, 2010) The exploration stage (15 – 25 years) is the time when individuals "explore occupational information, choose career alternatives, decide on occupations, and start to work" (Sharf, 2010, p. 261). Super proposes that individuals develop a realistic self-concept and then implement this self-concept in an occupation (Kidd, 2006). "Self-concept is the client's perception of herself in relation to the world around her "(Ali and Graham 2009, p.27). Career choice and development should involve developing and integrating this self-concept and information about the world of work (Athanasou and Esbroeck,2008). Another important factor in Super's Theory is *career maturity*, which is considered as an individual readiness to deal with the developmental tasks appropriate to the career stage (Kidd, 2006). This is important for guidance counsellors to understand as it relates to the readiness to make good choices in relation to occupations (Sharf, 2010). Super considered self-concept and vocational maturity to be vital elements of occupational choices (Sharf, 2010). However, critics argue that Super's theory does not fully reflect role changes over the last 20 to 30 years especially for women (Sharf, 2010).

Krumboltz Social Learning Theory argues that career decisions stem from behaviour and cognitive experiences (Sharf, 2010) and focuses on teaching students' career decision making techniques to select career alternatives and deal with unexpected events (Sharf,2010). Krumboltz's Planned Happenstance Theory is seen as an advancement on the Social Learning Theory of career decision making (Sharf,2010). It examines a range of learning experiences through a person's life and not just one career decision. Students "need to expand their capabilities and interests, and not base decisions on existing characteristics only" (Sharf 2010, p.381). The core of this theory is the fact that certain factors or events (categorised as social, educational or occupational), planned or unplanned can impact on an individual's career decision making (Sharf,2010). The counsellor's role

is to help students to incorporate chance events into their lives.by initiating a learning process that encourages curiosity (Sharf,2010).

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Lent, Brown and Hackett, attempts to explain the development of interests, educational and career choices, and performance and persistence in education and work (Kidd, 2006). SCTT is closely linked to Bandura's (1986) self -efficacy theory and focuses on a person's belief that they can successfully accomplish something (Lent et al., 1986). Self-efficacy combined with prior learning experiences affect an individual's belief in themselves and ultimately their career decision making (Sharf, 2010). SCCT focuses on several cognitive-person variables and on how these interact with other aspects of the person and their environment to help shape the course of career development (Lent et al., 2000). For the guidance counsellor, understanding the sources of self-efficacy is particularly important, as it leads to the design of career interventions (Kidd, 2006). "The concept of self-efficacy expectations is particularly useful for both understanding and modifying career behaviour" (Betz 2004, p.1).

From a constructivist perspective Savickas's Career Construction Theory allows the counsellor to take multiple perspectives on clients and then apply the appropriate career intervention, whether it is personal, vocational or educational (Savickas, 2011). To encourage client reflection and reflectivity it is important to create a safe environment, clear boundaries, strategic questioning, acknowledgement of client feelings, empathic responding, and encouragement (Savickas et al., 2009).

A relatively recent theory, Bill Law's Career Learning Theory - DOTS, addresses the management of "careers work" in a changing dynamic world (Law, 2000). The theory emphasises the student's ability to think critically about career and college choices, building on existing systematic thought processes coupled with feelings (Law, 2000). It views the career process as a narrative, which leads to a greater understanding of past actions and the impact these have on future outcomes, (Law, 2000). Law states that contemporary career management must take account of global economic and technological change (Law, 2000).

2.3.2 key Influencers in the Decision-Making process

This section examines some of the factors which have been shown to impact on the career decision making of students.

Firstly, parental influence and family social class can have a strong influence on the decision-making process of students (Smyth and Darmody, 2009). Parents have an essential role in the decision-making process and are one of the key stakeholders in the education of their children (NCGE,2004). Students consider the influence of their parents/ guardians, either directly or indirectly, as the most influential factor in their career decision making process (Griffin et al., 2011). The impact of home and community values cannot be underestimated on the choices made by young people after school (Alexander, 2015 and NCGE, 2004). Mc Coy et al. (2006) report that 76% of students received advice from parents about post school choices. This highlights the important role of parents in providing advice on college and courses. Parental involvement, especially in social–disadvantaged areas, has a positive impact on home school relationships (DES, 2006). A lack of parental involvement on the other hand can have a long-term impact on future career choices (Feldman, 2003). A low socioeconomic status (SES) encountered by some rural students is a key factor preventing further attainment in the education system (Byun et al., 2012). Family SES usually reflects "parents' educational and occupational attainment, as well as educational financial relational, and social networking resources that youth can access" (Xing and Rojewski 2018 p.51). Generally young people from lower SES families encounter more barriers and less family support in career exploration and development than their higher SES counterparts (Xing and Rojewski, 2018). Family background, therefore, and social position can affect educational and occupational opportunities (Kidd, 2006). Students with parents who are educated are generally better equipped to make informed decisions (Crosnoe and Muller, 2015). However, not all educated parents have valid information about what is needed to make informed, appropriate choices and some socioeconomically disadvantaged parents are more resourceful in finding out what needs to be done and are empowered to do it (Crosnoe and Muller, 2015).

A positive student teacher relationship forms and shapes the attitudes of students towards subject choices and hence towards course and college choices (Hearne et al., 2016b). Subject teachers may have a key role in providing information and advice relating to their

subject disciplines and related careers (NCGE, 2004). Teachers act as role models and can be more influential than guidance counsellors when it comes to subject choice, encouraging students through a positive student- teacher relationship (Smyth et al., 2011: Smyth and Hannan, 2006). This relationship helps in the forming and shaping of student's attitudes towards subject choice (Hearne et al., 2016b; (Smyth et al., 2011). Individual teachers, therefore, may be sought out by students for advice and information (NCGE, 2004). Self-efficacy especially with females can prevent them from developing interests in what is considered male dominated career fields such as science and engineering (Kidd, 2006). Interpersonal relationships therefore may have a strong impact on a young person's future career decisions (Kidd, 2006). The attitude of peers can have an impact on subject choices and hence on future career opportunities (Jeffers, 2007). Students who lack maturity and self-efficacy can rely and identify more with their peer group in terms of aptitudes and interests and make choices not associated with their inner self (Sugarman, 2001). Indeed, evidence suggests that "the composition of the peer group can shape academic progress, including course work, by passively modelling (or not) and actively encouraging (or discouraging) academic behaviours**"** (Crosnoe and Muller, 2014 p. 604). Further it is shown that when students from a low socioeconomic status (SES) are surrounded by generally socioeconomically advantaged peers then both peers and their parents can have a positive influence (Crosnoe and Muller, 2014).

Hann – Morrison (2011) suggest that the rural community has a distinct culture because of its cohesiveness and characteristics. "Rural Ireland is diverse in both its landscape and its people (CEDRA 2014, p.11). Boland (2017) describes rural Ireland as one associated with a dying population, with only 42% of the population residing there. Population decline is evident in these rural towns and communities where people from the age of 18 to 40 are missing (Duggan, 2018). The limited availability of educational resources and employment opportunities may be attributed to the decline of the younger population in rural communities (Philipson and Scharf,2004). Research has shown that for students coming from a rural background, location of college is very important and can have profound implications on career decisions (Bakke, 2018).Students in rural communities report that proximity both in terms of geography and in terms of social and cultural familiarity is an important factor when choosing a college/ university (Alexander,2016). The feeling of belonging to a place or community means that the choice to leave to pursue education elsewhere is laden with feelings of loss of identity (Bakke, 2018). For students

in rural communities, continuing with education means moving away from home at a relatively young age or travelling great distances to attend their preferred program (Bakke, 2018). Distance from the higher education institute is likely to be an important factor for those who rely heavily on the provision of grants from the state to participate in higher education (Cullinan, 2013). One suggestion would be to introduce a staggered distance payment system to encourage greater participation (Mc coy et al., 2010).

Alexander (2016) in her research identifies how living in a rural community prior to entering higher education has an impact on their education choices and subsequent career journey. Most students from a rural background recognise that leaving a rural community is a big step and "maintaining some connection with home, remaining proximate" as important (Alexander,2016, p.187). Variations in geographic accessibility may influence the type of higher education chosen, as well as the level of degree and field of study a school leaver pursues (Walsh et al., 2015). Alexander highlights the importance of the career guidance counsellor in understanding the rural context and how it can provide both career opportunities and challenges (Alexander, 2013). The reality of geography can often frustrate the ambition to follow education trajectories for young people in rural areas (Bakke, 2018).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed various theoretical approaches which underpin the factors influencing the career decision process of senior cycle students in a rural DEIS school. Multiple factors such as socio economic and rural background, school type, school and peer personnel can all be associated with influencing a student's decision-making process. The role of the guidance counsellor is an essential role in supporting and guiding students in this process, however due to the implications of Budget 2102, the provision of this service has been diminished and altered.

Chapter Three sets out the methodologies which were utilised in this research study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods and approaches used by the researcher and justifies how and why they were used (Thomas, 2013). It identifies the research questions and examines the data collection methods, sampling strategy, data analysis techniques, validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical issues.

3.1 Research Questions

Research design is an integral part of the research process setting out the plan for the research and formulating the plan in a logical way (Thomas, 2013). Underpinning research design are the questions the researcher aims to answer (Blaxter et al., 2010). These questions represent "the facets of inquiry that the researcher most wants to explore" (Miles et al., 2013, p.25).

The primary aim of this research was to examine how Senior Cycle students from a rural DEIS school make career related decisions for their future. To address this aim, the following research questions underpinned the study:

1. *How do Senior Cycle students in a DEIS school make future career related decisions?*
2. *Who or what are the key influencer's in Senior Cycle students' decision-making process?*
3. *What are the implications for the guidance service providing guidance to Senior Cycle students?*

Research questions are viewed as an essential early step, providing a point of orientation for the investigation (Bryman, 2007), and careful consideration is needed for the research design and methods to address them (Blaikie, 2000).

3.2 Research Methodology

This section will address the research methodology that underpinned this study.

3.2.1 Research Paradigm: Post Positivism

The aim of this research was to investigate the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in post primary education. Empirical research was used to carry out this investigation using quantitative research skills, methods and a post positivist paradigm

(Thomas, 2013; Blaxter et al., 2010). This involved the practice of fieldwork by the researcher who actively gathered information from participants through a series of questions from which data was obtained (Thomas, 2013; Blaxter et al., 2010). A paradigm is a "technical word used to describe the way we think about and research the world" (Thomas 2013, p.105). It provides an appropriate basis on how to think about and study the social world (Thomas, 2013). As the world view of an individual and that of a researcher are not the same, an individual's paradigm will influence their approach to conducting research.

Punch (2011) highlights that paradigms influence researchers from the questions they want addressed to the methods they use to find answers to these questions. All paradigms encompass ontology, epistemology and methodology stances (Ryan, 2006; Thomas, 2013). These involve a study of the type of events that exist in the social world and how we look and find out about these events (Thomas, 2013). They help the researcher to critically look and examine the research question and how to answer it (Thomas, 2013). Ontology is concerned with what the researcher is looking at and what constitutes reality, "the kinds of things that we assume to exist in the world, and how those things should be viewed and studied" (Thomas, 2013, p.118). Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how this knowledge can be created, acquired, and communicated to find out more about social reality (Ryan, 2006; Thomas, 2013). Methodology deals with the why, what, and from where, when and how data was collected and analysed (Ryan, 2006). For this researcher the ontological and epistemological viewpoint is that data collected using scientific methods provide a greater justification of knowledge and that knowledge about the social reality can be obtained objectively.

According to Thomas (2013), within education there exists two general approaches to paradigms, interpretivism and positivism. Interpretivism is associated with subjective qualitative research methods through observation, case study or interview methods (Thomas, 2013). It requires the researcher to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants and then uses those experiences to construct and interpret their understanding from the collected data (Thanh and Le Thanh, 2015). Data collected is based and shaped on human behaviour and experiences, therefore the researcher must reconcile the subjective interpretations of the participants (Thomas, 2013). The data collected cannot be analysed scientifically or objectively (Thomas, 2013; Thanh and Le Thanh, 2015).

For this study the researcher wanted to gather a large amount of objective data from participants, so it was decided that the interpretivist approach was unsuitable, and positivism was chosen. Positivism is viewed as a scientific approach to research and is generally associated with the epistemology of quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2011). Positivist approaches are generally associated with decision-making processes with a view to generalising to the wider population (Thomas, 2013). Data can be obtained objectively – observed, studied and measured scientifically (Thomas, 2013). The positivist approach strives for "objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability, pattering, the construction of laws and rules of behaviour and the ascription of causality" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 31) and includes methods such as surveys, experiments and questionnaires (Thomas, 2013: Blaxter et al., 2010). In this study the researcher wanted to analyse the data to decipher any emerging themes and patterns or factors which influence students in their decision-making process at senior level.

However, with the positivist approach the "putative objectivity of science is called into question and objectivity is treated as problematic" (Cohen et al., 2018 p. 14). Thus, Mertens (2015) proposes the post positivist paradigm which respects the positivist approach but acknowledges that humans are complex. Post positivists hold the same beliefs as positivists; however, they maintain that human nature is imperfect, so conclusions reached are based on probabilities (Blaxter et al., 2010). In general, "theory is underdetermined by evidence, as the same evidence can support several different theories" (Cohen et al., 2018 p.16). "The values, biographies, perceptions, theories, environment and existing knowledge of a researcher influence what is being observed" (Phillips and Burbules in Cohen et al., 2018, p. 16). Scotland (2012) proposes that post positivist knowledge is more certain and objective than knowledge from other paradigms. The use of this paradigm allowed for quantifiable numerical data to be collected and analysed and conclusions derived (Gray, 2014). This objective and scientific approach was the most appropriate for this research study.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

This section will discuss the data collection and analysis methods utilised for this research study**.**

3.3.1 Access and sampling strategy

This research commenced with ethical approval received from the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee (*2019_03_21_EHS*) on 28th March 2019. For the purpose of data collection access to and sampling of fourth and fifth-year students was necessary. One rural post primary DEIS school in the west of Ireland was invited to participate in the study. As the research involved gathering data from students under the age of 18, informed consent must be obtained from the gate keepers, parents/ guardians and students (Sugarman, 2001). A Subject Information Letter *(See Appendix B)* and Consent Form *(See Appendix C)* was supplied to the Principal (Gatekeeper) of the school requesting permission to carry out the research, and this was granted on 3rd April 2019. Before administering the questionnaire, it was important to explain to the participants what the research was about, methods of data collection, anonymity, confidentiality and ability of participants to withdraw at any time prior to data analysis stage (Bell and Waters, 2014). The researcher communicated this information to the relevant year groups on the 8th and 9th April, where they were supplied with the relevant information letters and consent forms (*See Appendix C, D, E).* The researcher collected the parent/ guardian forms from the students between the 22nd and the 27th April 2019.

Sampling procedures for experimental research refers to "a subset that is representative of a larger population" (Thomas, 2013, p. 137). In this study purposive sampling was used as it is recommended for questionnaire-based research because it involves participants from a sample population of whom the researcher is interested and which is reflective of the whole (Thomas, 2013). With purposive sampling, however, results cannot be generalised beyond the sample which could lead to inaccurate information (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study fourth and fifth students (*n120*) were invited to take part. In total 95 signed consent forms were returned. In fourth year, 50 consent forms were issued with 41 returned, and in fifth year 70 consent forms were issued with 54 returned.

3.3.2 Data Collection Instrument: Online Questionnaire

The sole data collection instrument used in the study was on online questionnaire. Survey Monkey was used as all participants were able to access the account in a location and at a time that was suitable to them. "Questionnaires are one of the most widely used social research techniques" (Blaxter et al., 2010), p201). They record both quantitative and qualitative information from a wide range of participants (Thomas, 20130). By employing a questionnaire, the researcher collected data from a varied number of respondents in a short time period (Thomas, 2013). The benefits of using Survey Monkey included its usability for participants. There are no requirements to download software or to install codes or scripts, and various tools are available for the data analysis stage (Symonds, 2011). It is a fast, cost effective and efficient way of way of collecting data (Bell, 2005). Online questionnaires have become increasingly popular mainly because they are user friendly (Cohen et al., 2011). Generally, online questionnaires are carried out in the respondents own free time therefore personal biases are reduced, allowing for greater objectivity and accuracy of results (Bell, 2005). Finally, once the data collection stage had been completed the data analysis process could begin (Thomas, 2013).

There are some limitations to the use of online questionnaires as a data collection method. An online questionnaire requires the participant to engage with the instrument and they must complete it in its entirety for accuracy/ data collection (Thomas, 2013). By their nature, questionnaires lend themselves to more quantitative style questions and analysis than qualitative questions (Blaxter et al., 2010), therefore they usually provide an understanding of factual information, attitudes or act as part of an assessment (Thomas, 2013). However, with careful consideration questions can be "tightly structured, but also allow the opportunity for a more open and discursive response if required" (Thomas, 2013, p. 207). The use of online questionnaires assumes participants have access to internet and have a basic level of technological proficiency (Symonds, 2011). Nevertheless, in this study, an online questionnaire was determined as an appropriate method to collect the data required as school computers could be made available to students after school for those without internet access at home.

3.3.3 Instrument Development and Structure

Careful consideration was given to the development of the questionnaire in order to design, develop and refine the questions so that research questions are addressed (Couper, 2000). The researcher considered the target audience of students and formatted questions in a way that was easy to understand and used suitable and easily understood language (Blaxter et al., 2010). Excessive use of one type of question can be off putting and repellent to respondents (Cohen et al., 2011) Therefore, in order for questionnaires to be effective, they must hold different types of questions such as open, closed, multiple choice, ranking and Likert responses (Blaxter et al., 2010).

Thus, the content design of the questionnaire *(see Appendix G*) derived from the literature review and encompassed three thematic areas to investigate. Section 1: General demographic information about participants. Section 2: Collected data on factors that influence career decisions and the process involved. Section 3: Collected data on the provision of guidance counselling to participants. In total there were 31 questions consisting of open and closed ended questions, multiple choice questions and ranking Likert style questions which generated both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.3.4 Piloting of the Online Questionnaire

Due to time pressures, a paper-based questionnaire was piloted on 8th March. This process enabled the researcher to adjust or remove any flaws/ inaccuracies and to redraft the questionnaire so future respondents would experience no difficulties (Marshall, 2005). Furthermore, piloting was essential to increase the reliability and validity of the questionnaire (Marshall, 2005, Cohen et al., 2007). A convenience sample was used which was representative of the wider sample and involved two students, one 4th year and one 5th year. The researcher was present for the piloting to ensure correct interpretation of questions (Marshall, 2005). The piloting examined the respondent's views on the structure, the layout, clarity and length of time to complete (Marshall, 2005) *(See table 3.1).*

Issues identified	Issue rectification
1. Questions were identified to be repetitive in sections 1 and 3.	The researcher amalgamated questions in both sections.
2. There were too many questions to complete in the time frame of 20 minutes.	Amalgamation of the questions and restructuring other questions brought the number of questions down to 31
3. Participants highlighted the overuse of closed questions and the need for more variety in the style of questioning.	The researcher adopted a variety of question styles including more Likert and open-ended questions.
4. Participants highlighted that the language used in some questions was confusing.	The researcher re – examined the language used in these questions and adjusted where necessary.
5. Participants highlighted that there were too many questions in Section 3 on career guidance provision and not enough on the career decision making process.	The researcher reduced the number of such questions in the section. The remaining questions were general and less focused on career provision within the school.

Table 3.1 Recommendations from online Questionnaire

3.3.5 Administration of the Questionnaire

The data collection period was from 1st May 2019 to 24th May 2019. Permission was obtained from the Principal for the school's IT coordinator to disseminate the online questionnaire to the consenting students according to the Schools Data Regulations. In total 95 emails were distributed. Participants were informed that the questionnaire link would be open until the 17th May after they received the Online Questionnaire Information email (see Appendix F).

In research, while online questionnaires ensure a large number of participants can be surveyed, it is possible to have lower response rates and poorer answers (Blaxter et al., 2010). To generate as high a response rate as possible, reminder emails were sent to participants. On the 17th May a total of 77 participants had responded. The researcher decided to extend the closing date to the 24th May and sent another reminder email to all participants, which generated a further 10 responses. Research has shown that 50 % is regarded as an acceptable response rate to online questionnaires (Nulty, 2008). In this study, the final response rate was 72.5% when the survey closed on 24th May 2019.

3.3.6 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis began when the collection of data was completed (Blaxter et al., 2010) on the 24th May. As the questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative data using various types of questions, different approaches were required to analyse the data. The data collected online, by Survey Monkey was downloaded and imported to Microsoft Excel for coding and editing (Bryman, 2012). The quantitative data was analysed and interpreted using scientific methods and techniques (Thomas, 2013). All quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and the interrelationship between pairs of variables using SPSS (Blaxter et al., 2010: Thomas, 2013). One of the main advantages of using this package is "you can tell it easily what kind of data you are collecting, and then ask it to compute appropriate statistics" (Thomas, 2013, p.262). Data from open ended qualitative questions was coded, sorted and emerging patterns defined (Morehouse and Maykut and 1994) and analysed using the "constant comparative method" (Thomas, 2013, p.235). Thematic patterns were identified, and similarities and differences were applied by the researcher.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

This section will discuss validity, reliability and reflexivity in relation to the study.

3.4.1 Validity

Validity is a key requirement for all types of research (Cohen et al., 2007). It reflects "whether your methods, approaches and techniques actually relate to, or measure, the issues you have been exploring" (Blaxter et al 2010, p. 245). In quantitative research, the validity of an online questionnaire refers to the degree to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Pallant, 2010). Validity therefore is concerned with accuracy in measurement and whether the conclusions of the research are reflective of the interpretation put on it (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996). "An account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena, that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise" (Hammersley, 1987, pg. 69). The aim of this study was to present accurate results and to establish whether they accurately portrayed the influencing factors facing senior cycle students when making career related decisions.

To increase the validity of the research, the researcher carried out one piloting phase prior to the final questionnaire being administered. Personal biases were avoided by selecting a sample of students, that were unknown to the researcher, which gives more accurate results and objectivity. The survey was completed anonymously, and participants were reminded that no link would be made between them and the school. The aim of this was to increase the objectivity and accuracy of results and reduce personal biases. This required standardisation of the ways in which the data was collected, analysed and interpreted (Flick 2015). Purposeful sampling was employed, and all data collected was through an online provider which was coded, which also increased the research objectivity and validity.

In quantitative research the extent to which results can be generalised is by assessing external validity (Flick, 2015). External validity or generalisability is the extent to which results from a study can be applied to other situations and persons outside the research (Flick 2015; Blaxter et al., 2010). Purposive sampling was utilised with senior students from fourth and fifth year in a rural DEIS school. Participants therefore were representative of a specific population (Thomas, 2013). The researcher is cognisant of the fact that all schools work differently with different organisational backgrounds and contexts, attitudes and value systems (Cohen et al., 2007). With a response rate of 72.5% (n87) the researcher is confident that the findings from the sample can be used to describe probable influences on fourth and fifth year post primary students concerning career decisions more so than generalised.

3.4.2 Reliability

In quantitative research reliability is the degree to which "a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions" (Bell and Waters, 2014, p.120). It is assumed that research can be repeated using the same instrument and generate a similar result (Cohen et al., 2011). The reliability of data relates to how accurate the results are and how free the results are from error (Pallant, 2010). To access the reliability of this study an internal consistency measurement namely, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used (Pallant, 2010). Theoretically Cronbach's alpha results should give a number somewhere between 0 to 1 usually, with the higher value indicating greater reliability (Pallant, 2010). The optimum alpha coefficient should be 0.7 or above, indicating good reliability (Field, 2014, Pallant, 2010). In this study, the online questionnaire revealed a

Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.882 indicating adequate internal consistency or reliability.

3.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity must take a central part in the research study (Blaxter et al., 2010). Reflexivity is a process where the researcher objectively looks at their role, actions, approaches, techniques and methods used. It gives the researcher the opportunity to reflect on plans and make changes where necessary (Blaxter et al., 2010). Reflexivity requires the researcher to turn the lens on themselves, taking responsibility for their own situation within the research and the impact this could have on the setting, people, question, and data of the research (Berger, 2015). It is important that the researcher understands their own role in terms of professional, personal, social and emotional wellbeing and how their own biases, attitudes, values, actions, feelings and assumptions can impact on the outcome of the research (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, the researcher is a teacher in a DEIS school and a trainee guidance counsellor. Based on her past experience of career decisions making she believed that influencers such as parents and socio-economic background are instrumental in shaping the future of their children.

Keeping a journal and recording thoughts and experiences is a good way to achieve positive and honest reflexivity (Blaxter et al., 2010). In this study, reflexivity was employed using a research journal where thoughts, questions, dates and key times were recorded. Researchers must be "willing and able to ask critical questions of themselves" to achieve this objectivity (Hearne, 2013, p.5). This enhances the accuracy of the research and "the credibility of the findings by accounting for the researches values, beliefs, knowledge and biases" (Cutcliffe, 2003, p.137). To avoid personal biases about career decisions the researcher put careful thought into the structure and wording of the questions in the questionnaire. Students completed the questionnaire in their own free time ensuring their anonymity was maintained throughout. Regular meetings and reflective practice occurred between the researcher and supervisor to enhance the reliability and validity of the research.

3.6 Ethical Considerations of the Study

Ethics are "sets of moral principles or norms that are used to guide moral choices of behaviour and relationships with others" (Gray 2014, p.68). Researchers are expected to "strike a balance between the demands placed on them as professionals in pursuit of truth, and their subjects' rights and values potentially threatened by the research" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.51). Ethical concerns protect the participants in our care but also the safety and wellbeing of the researcher (Blaxter et al., 2010). The researcher was guided by her own judgement and reflexivity in order to prevent ethical issues from occurring and to ensure that findings can be viewed as credible, trustworthy and scholarly (Hearne, 2013). Institutional Ethical Approval was granted by the University of Limerick Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research (EHS) Ethics Committee on 28th March 2019. The researcher adhered to the Institute of Guidance Counsellor (2012) *Code of Ethics* and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (2008) *Research Code of Ethics* and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 guidelines. The professional Codes articulate four essential principles 1) respect for the rights and dignity of the client; 2) competence; 3) responsibility; and 4) integrity (IGC, 2012; NCGE, 2008).

Ethical research involves informed consent, reaching agreement about data, how this data will be used and disseminated (Blaxter et al., 2010). When conducting research with persons under the age of 18, consent is important (Hearne, 2013). As a teacher, a trainee counsellor, and a researcher I had a duty of care to all participants. While it was recognised that the research posed a minimum risk, the researcher explained to all participants that if any issues arose or if they wanted to discuss colleges and courses choices further, that guidance counsellors would be available to assist. (Hearne, 2013).

Thomas (2013) stresses the importance of a signed consent form from gatekeepers, students and parents/guardians, explaining the details of the project and their involvement. All parties involved in this research were provided with detailed information letters outlining the purpose, benefits, risks, voluntary participation and confidentiality associated *(See Appendix A, C, E).* Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity is an important aspect of research. It is essential that all data is stored in a safe location both for manual and electronic data (Flick, 2015). The researcher must ensure that the identity of participants is not disclosed to others. "A consistent anonymisation of the data and a parsimonious use of

the context information are necessary" (Flick, 2015, p.36). In this study, all consent forms received from participants were stored in a locked filing cabinet. In the case of the on-line questionnaire anonymous responses were requested from participants and the survey data was password protected.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodological research design of this study, the research paradigm chosen and the data collection instrument utilised. It further addressed the participants sample, data analysis, validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical consideration associated.

Chapter four will present the data and findings.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter the results of the primary data collected from the online questionnaire are presented. The quantitative data is presented in graphical format, followed by the qualitative data pertinent to the survey question.

4.1 Online Questionnaire Data Analysis

For the purpose of this research, the researcher used a post positivist approach and quantitative data collection method. The researcher used the online platform Survey Monkey for data collection and after the completion date the data was then downloaded and organised into an excel report sheet for further analysis. The findings, in this case, are based on a sample of one hundred and twenty 4th and 5th year students with a final response rate of 72.5% (n87). As the findings of the online questionnaire contained both quantitative and qualitative data, both methods were analysed separately. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS and converted into graph and chart format. The qualitative data was analysed using content analysis approach (Thomas, 2013). This analysis compared and examined themes, words, and patterns in the data and the researcher then was able to group the responses into emerging themes (Thomas, 2013).

4.2 Findings

The findings will be presented in line with the four demarcated sections of the questionnaire

4.2.1 Section One: Demographic Profile

Question 1 to 5 gathered data on the demographic profile of the respondents. Question 1 (Gender) was answered by 100% (n87) of the respondents with a gender breakdown of 56% (n49) female and 44% (n38) male. Using nominal data analysis, Question 1 was cross tabulated with Question 4, students year group, which identified that 47% (n41) were TY respondents, with 39% (n16) female and 61% (n25) male. The remaining 53% (n46) represented 5th year respondents, with 72% (n33) female and 28% (n13) male. (*See chart 4.1).*

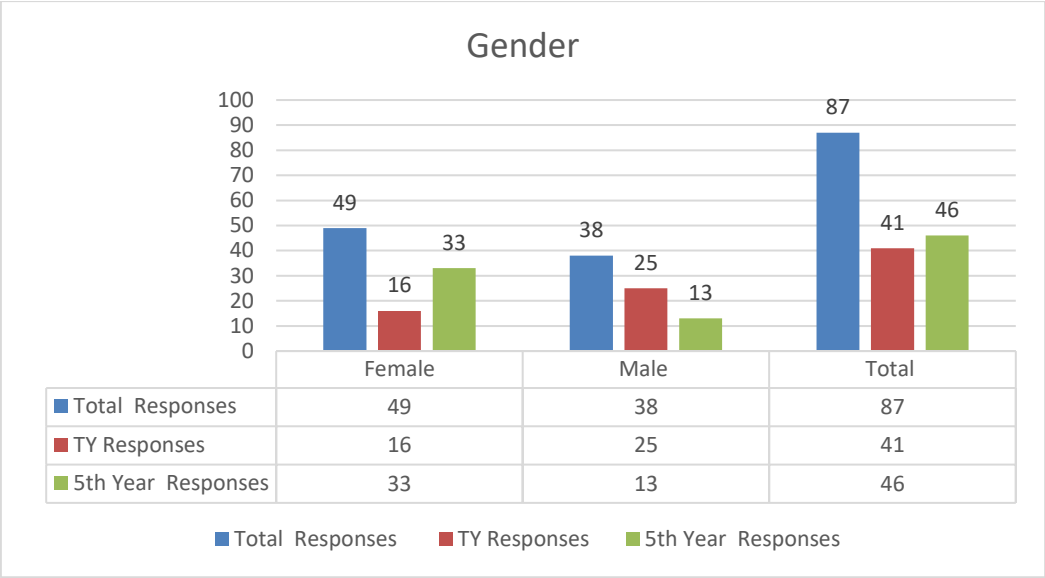


Chart 4.1: Gender

There was a 100% (n87) response rate to Question 2 regarding age of respondents. This ratio question identified that the mean age was 16.6 years of age representing 48% (n42) of all respondents. The second largest age group were 17-year olds representing 40% (n35), and the smallest proportion of respondents, 2% (n2) were 15-year olds. Only 9% (n8) of 18-year olds were represented in the data. Interestingly the data shows the age bracket for the TY respondents comprising of 15, 16- and 17-year olds with fifth year comprising of 16, 17- and 18-year olds. *(See Chart 4.2).*

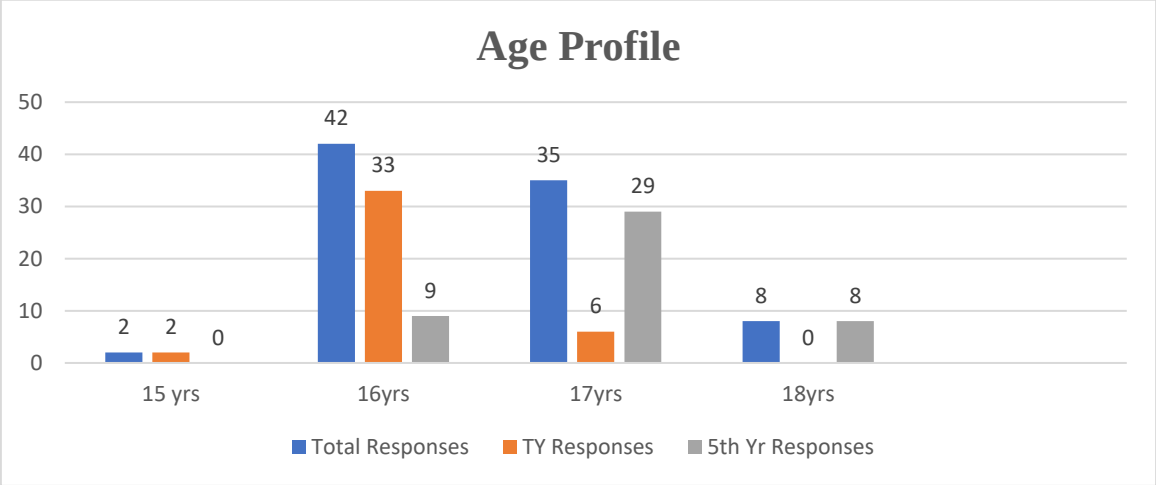


Chart 4.2: Age Profile

Question 3 (nationality), an open-ended question, was answered by 98% (n85) of respondents. The data demonstrates the diversity of the population with the largest nationality being Irish at 81% (n70). Other nationalities included Polish 4.5 % (n4),

Romanian 2.3% (n2), Lithuanian 2.3% (n2), with South African, Venezuelan, Latvian, Indian, Filipino, Czech all representing 1%(n1). *(See chart 4.3)*

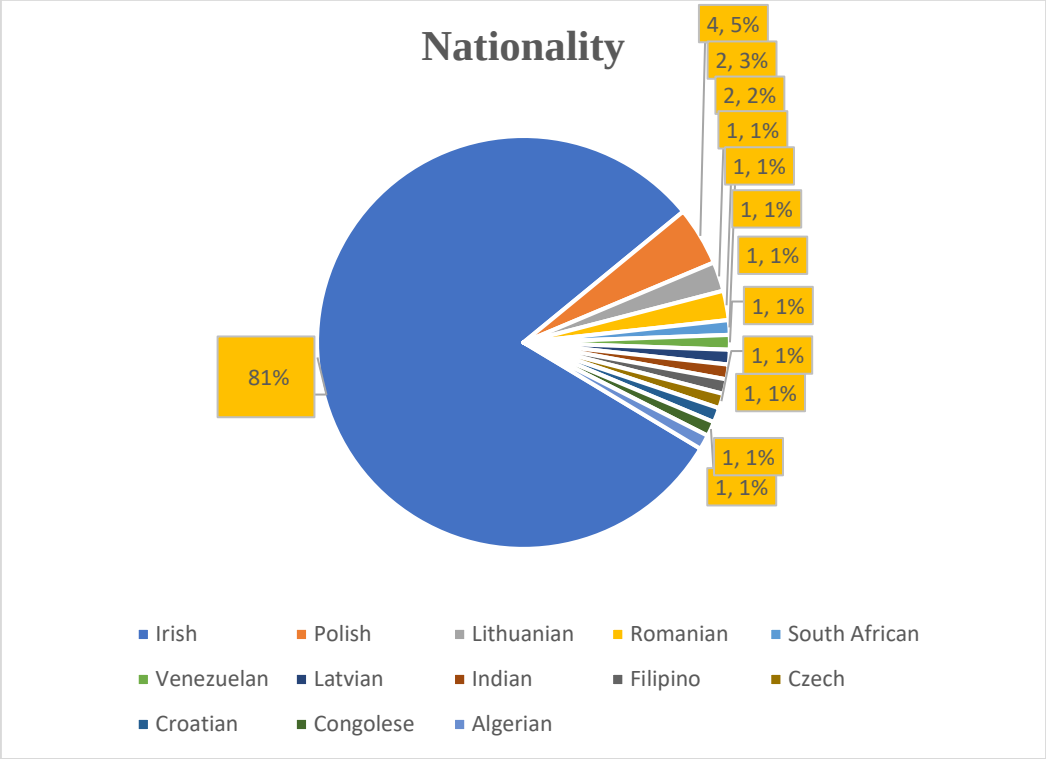


Chart 4.3: Nationality

Question 5, a nominal question, which examined the completion status of respondent's parents/guardians and siblings secondary and third level education which had a100% (n87) response rate. *(See Chart 4.4).* The findings indicate that more mothers 74% (n64) than fathers 54% (n47) completed the Leaving Certificate, 19% (n16) of respondents did not know whether their parents had completed this examination, and 6% (n5) highlighted the question was not applicable. Regarding siblings, 44% (n38) indicated their brother/sister had completed the Leaving Certificate, 2%(n2) did not know and 23% (n20) indicated the question was not applicable.

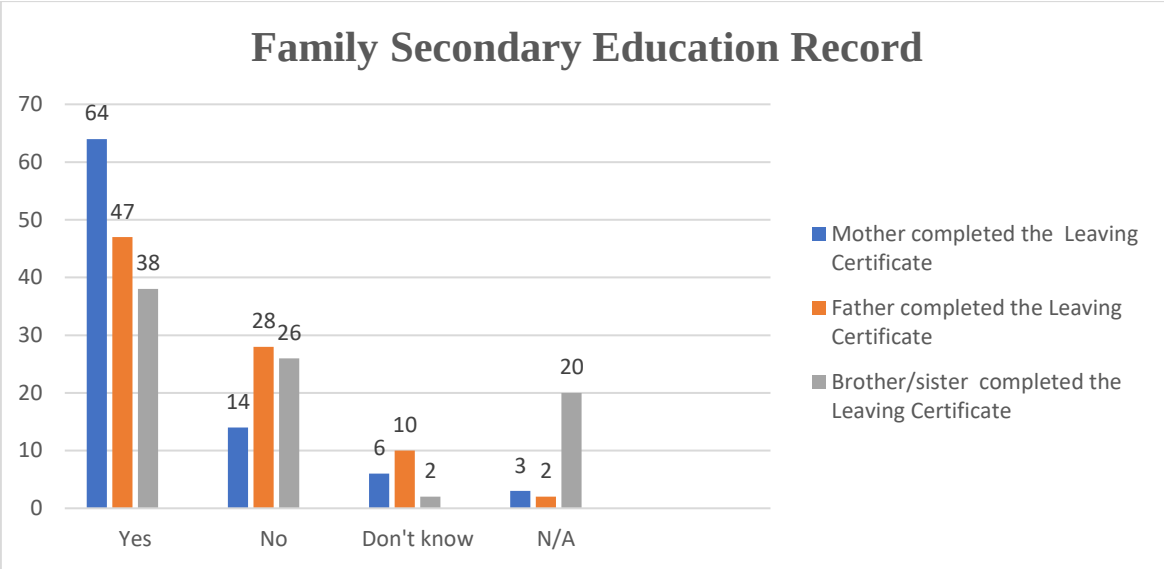


Chart 4.4: Secondary Education Record

Question 5 also looked at the third level educational record of family members. *(See Chart 4.5)* The findings indicate that 45% (n39) of mothers and 38% (n33) of fathers had completed a third level course. Conversely, 39% (n34) of mothers and 46% (n40) of fathers had not completed a third level course, *27*% (n25) did not know and only 2% (n2) highlighted that this question was not applicable. Furthermore 51% (n44) indicated their sibling/s did not complete a third level course while 21% (n18) had a brother/ sister who had completed a third level course and 23% (n20) indicating the question was not applicable.

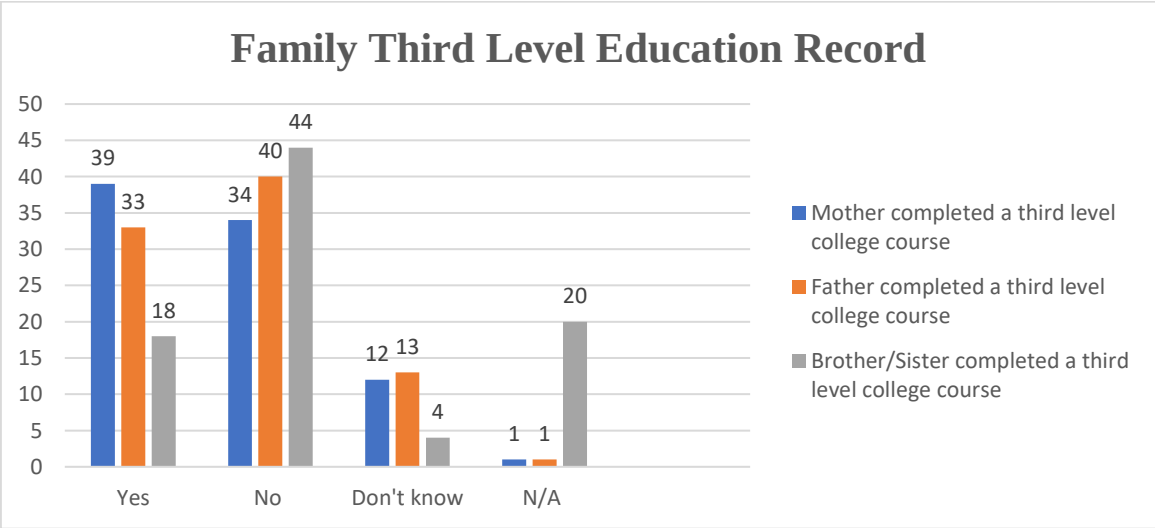


Chart 4.5: Third Level Education Record

4.2.2 Section Two: Information on Career Decision Making

This section presents the findings from questions 6 to 14. These questions sought data about respondents 'career decisions making process and consisted of open, closed and Likert type questions. Firstly, Question 6 sought information about how certain they felt about what they want to do after they finish school. It had a full response rate (100%, n87), identifying that 14% (n12) of respondents are very certain, 45% (n39) certain and 41% (n36) uncertain. *(See Chart 4.6).* Surprisingly this represents a high percentage of students at this stage who are uncertain of what they want to do.

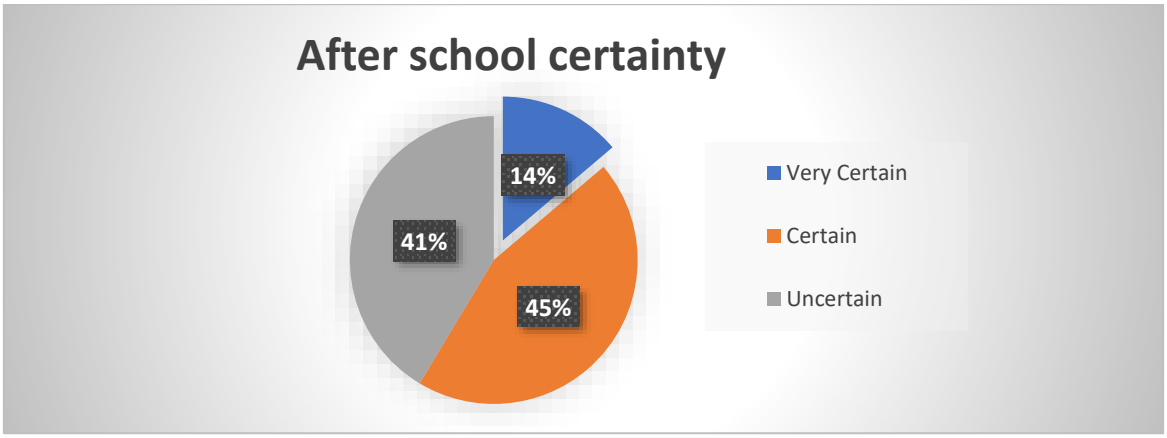


Chart 4.6: After School Certainty

Question 6 was correlated with question 2 (age profile) which identified that 2% (n2) 15-year-old participants were certain about what they wanted to do after school. Out of the 48% (n42), 16-year olds participants, 47% (n20) were certain about what they wanted to do, 4% (n17) were uncertain and only 12% (n5) were very certain. Of the 40% (n35) 17year olds, 49% (n17) were uncertain, 34% (n12) were certain and 17% (n6) were very certain. Finally, of the 9% (n8) 18-year olds 63% (n5) were certain, 25% (n2) were uncertain and 12% (n1) were very certain. (*See chart 4.7).*

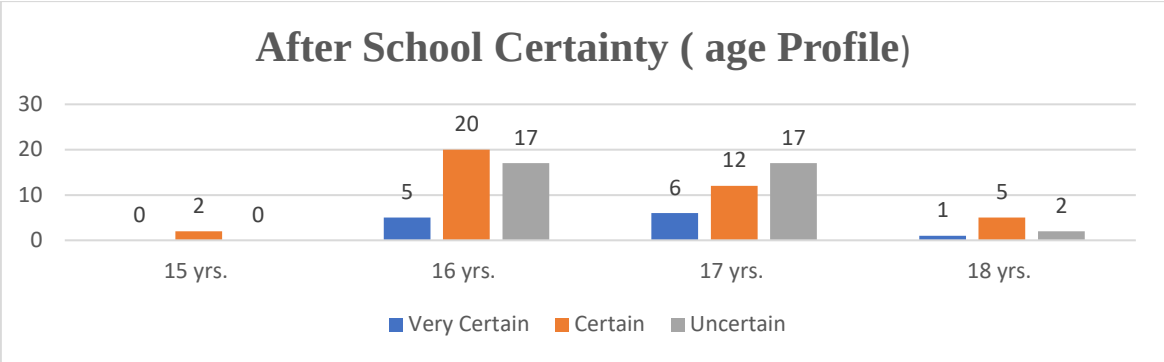
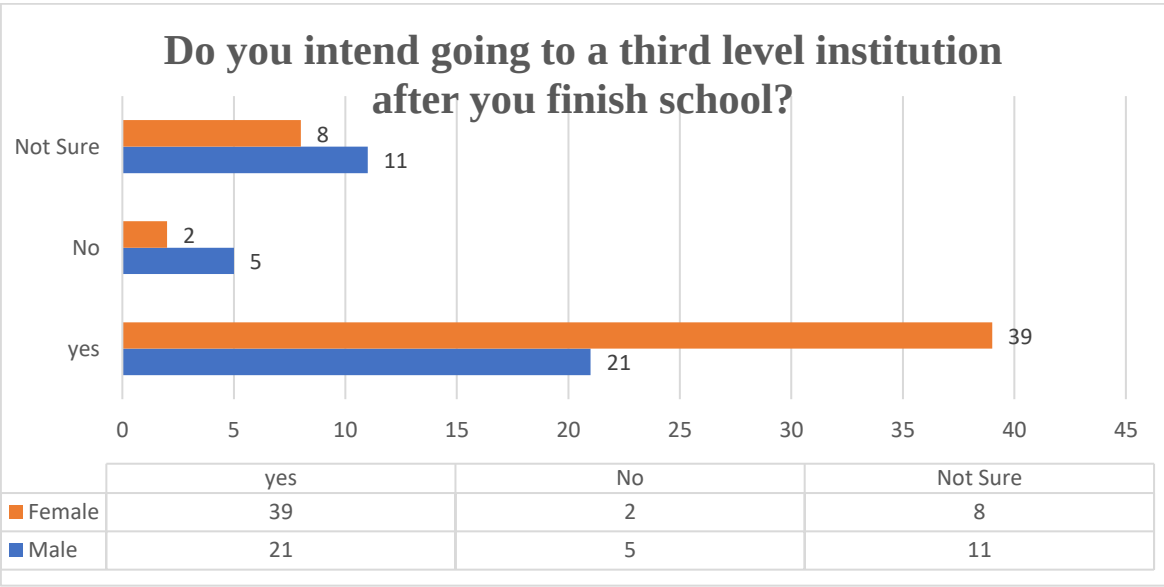


Chart 4.7: After School Certainty (Age Profile)

Question 7 asked respondents about their intention to go to third level college after they leave school. It had a 100% (n87) rate and identified that 63% (n58) intend going to third level, and 21% (n19) are not sure and 10% (n9) do not intend going to third level. This question was correlated with question 1, identifying that 45% (n39) of females and 24% (n21) of males intend going to third level, 9% (n8) of females and 13% (n11) of males are not sure, and 2% (n2) of females and 6% (n5) of males do not intend going. *(See chart 4.8*).

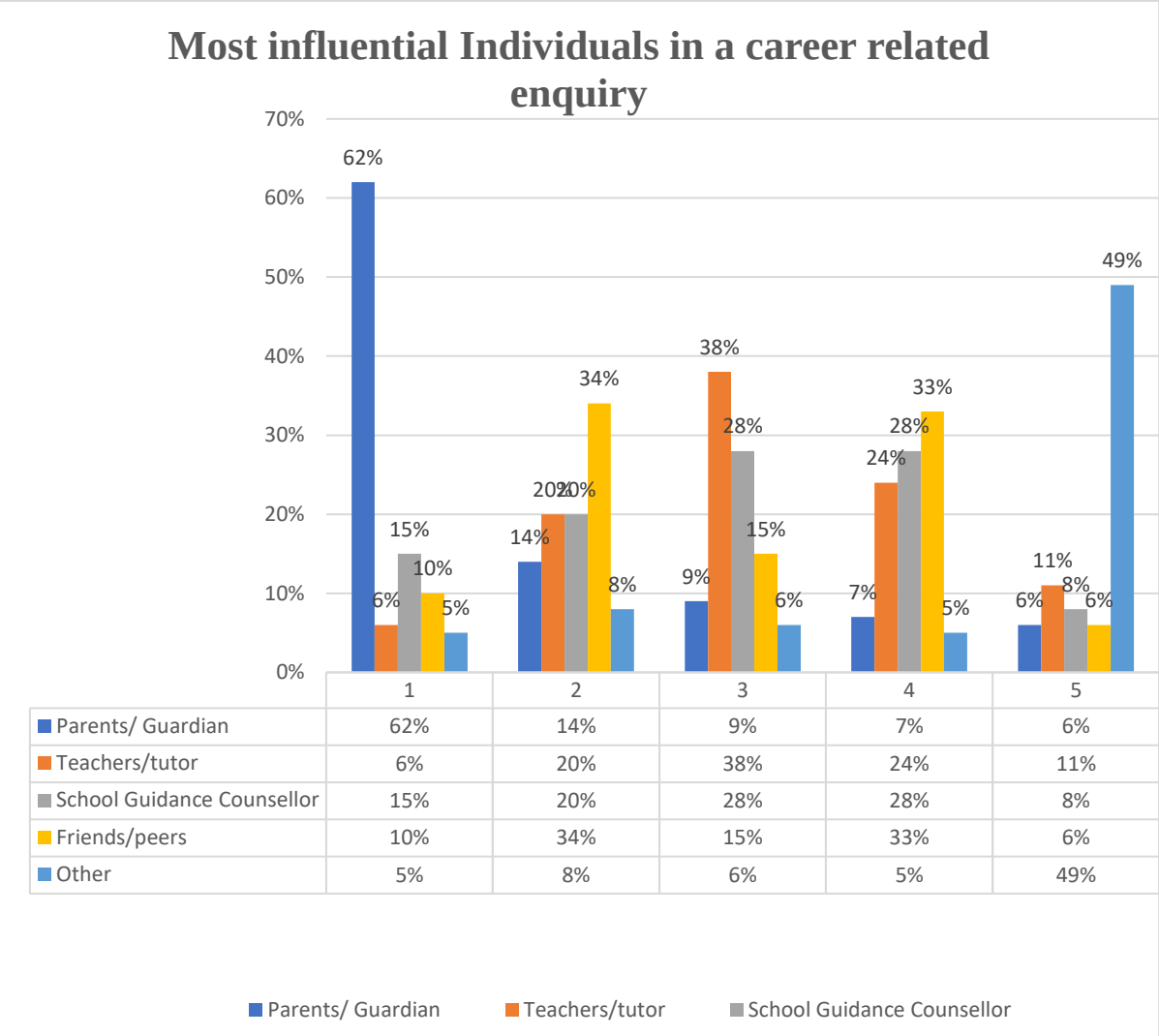


	yes	No	Not Sure
Female	39	2	8
Male	21	5	11

Chart 4.8: Third level Intentions

With regards to the second part of question 7, of those who do not intend going to third level, the options indicated were: getting a job 14% (n12), apprenticeship 5% (n4), doing a Post Leaving Certificate course 3% (n3), flight academy 1%(n1) or unsure 8% (n7).

Question 8 is an interval Likert scale question and was analysed by data disaggregation. This question sought information on the most influential individual the respondent is likely to talk to about a career related enquiry. This question was answered by 100 % (n87) with 28% (n24) of the respondents partially answering the question. Interestingly the most influential individuals in chronological order were Parents/ Guardians at 62% (n54), and others was the second highest at 49% (n43), however when asked, respondents did not specify who these "others" were. Teachers/ Tutors were third highest at 38% (n33). Friends/ Peers were the fourth highest at 34% (n30). The school guidance counsellor was the fifth highest at 28% (n24). *See Chart 4.9).*



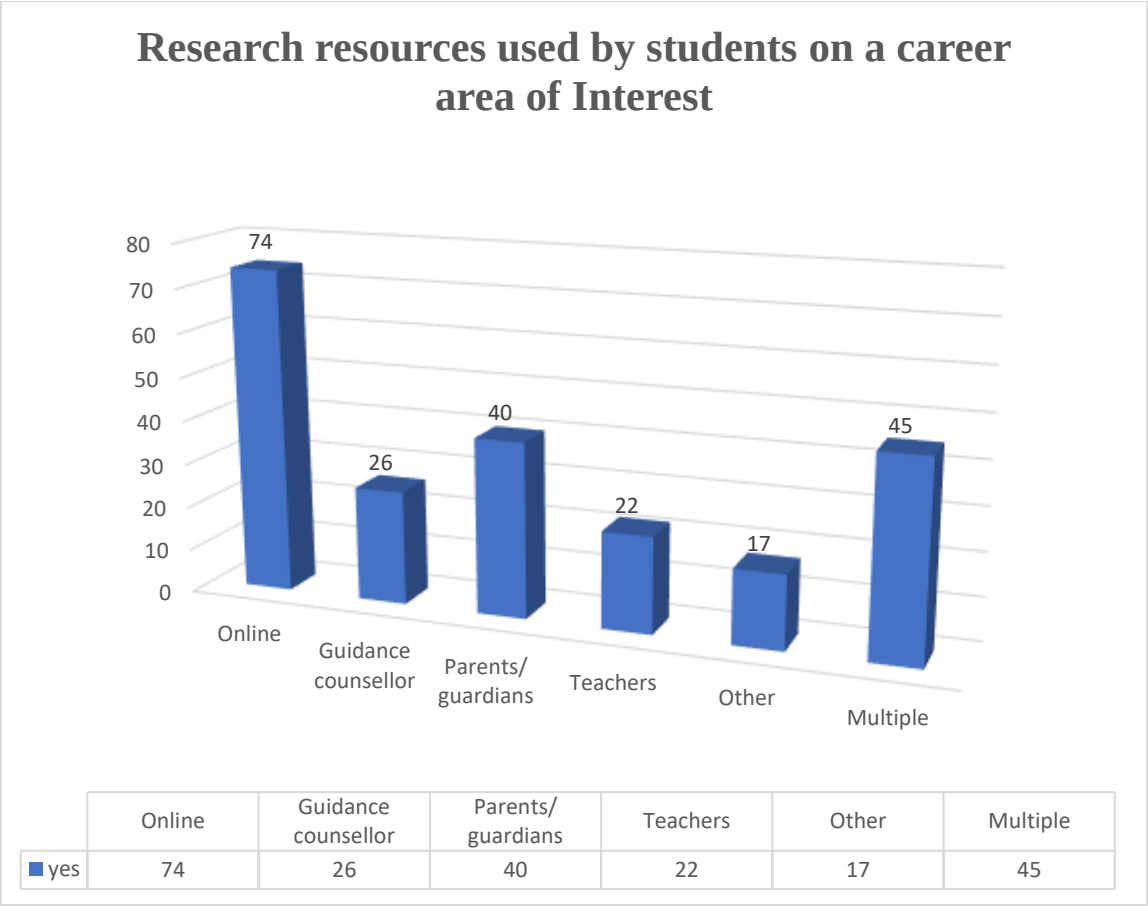
	1	2	3	4	5
Parents/ Guardian	62%	14%	9%	7%	6%
Teachers/tutor	6%	20%	38%	24%	11%
School Guidance Counsellor	15%	20%	28%	28%	8%
Friends/peers	10%	34%	15%	33%	6%
Other	5%	8%	6%	5%	49%

Chart 4.9: Most Influential Individuals in a Career Related Enquiry

Question 9 was a nominal open-ended question which sought to find out if participants had carried out any research on a career area of interest. It was answered by 100% (n87) with 57% (n50) stating they had carried out research and 43% (n37) had not. Interestingly when correlated with question 4 it highlighted of those respondents who stated YES, 74% (n37) were in 5th year and 26% (n13) were in TY. Similarly, of the 43% (n37) who stated NO 24% (n9) were in 5th year, while 76% (n28) were in TY.

The second part to this question asked those respondents who had carried out research, to identify what resources they had used. The most utilised resources in chorological order were the "Career Interest Inventory" at 70% (n35) of respondents. "Other" was the second highest selected by 36% (n18) of respondents who stated items such as Careers Portal/Qualifax and Eirquest. "The Cambridge Profile Test" was the third highest at 18% (n9), while the "CAT/DAT" test was found to be the fourth highest for 6% (n3) of respondents.

Question 10 asked respondents had they carried out research on a career area of interest to them. This question was answered by 100% (n87) of respondents with 95% (n83) replying YES and only 5% (n4) replying NO to this question. The second part of this question sought information from those who responded YES and on the type of research carried out by the participants on a career area of interest. It was answered by 100% (n=87) of the YES respondents. In terms of resources, overall 85% (n74) used online sources (Careers Portal/Qualifax), 46% (n40) received support from parents, 30% (n26) accessed the guidance counsellor, and 25% (n22) sought support from teachers in the school. However, the data indicates that 51% (n45) use more than one of these resources (multiple). The qualitative data obtained from this question reported that 20% (n17) of respondents used a variety of other resources, providing examples such as *"people working in the area", internet", "other family members" "others doing the course", "colleges and college prospectus"* as sources of information. (*See Chart 4.10).*



	Online	Guidance counsellor	Parents/ guardians	Teachers	Other	Multiple
yes	74	26	40	22	17	45

Chart 4.10: Research resources used by students on a career area of interest

Question 11 asked TY respondents whether they did work experience as part of the TY programme. This question was answered by 100% (n87) of respondents with 94% (n82) answering YES and only 6% (n5) answering NO. Of those who answered YES 27% (n22) found their work experience very useful in planning for their future career options, with 54% (n45) found it useful and interestingly 19% (n16) did not find it useful. *(See chart 4.11).*

The qualitative data identified a mutual common theme of the development of self-awareness and a greater understanding of the world of work. One respondent highlighted *"Gave me an interest in other career options other than music",* whilst another stated *"it helped me realize what it's like in a real job".*

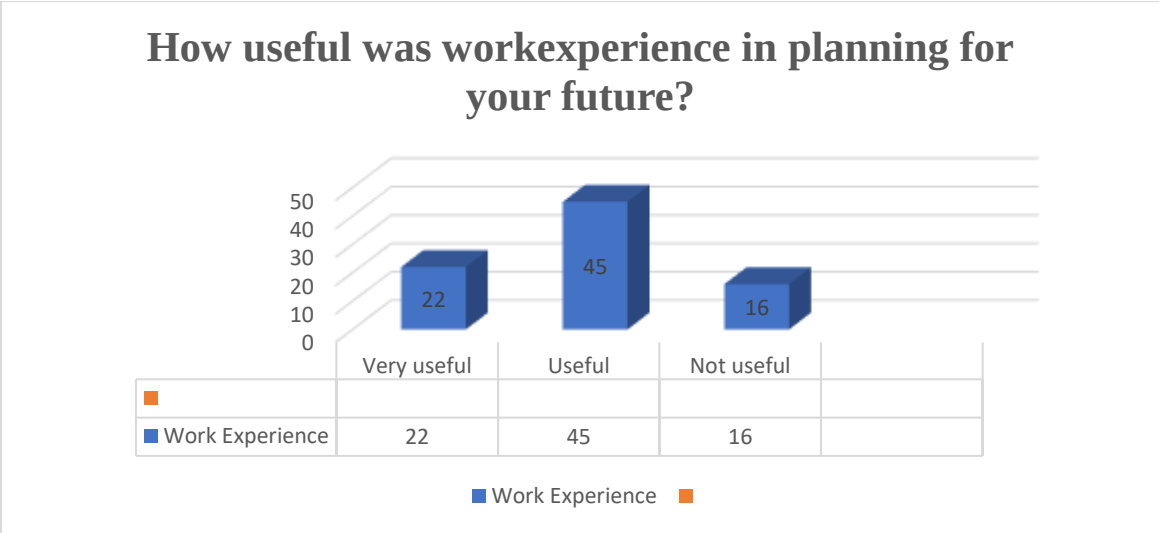


Chart 4.11: How useful was Work Experience in planning for your future?

Question 12 was answered by 100% (n87) of respondents. This question examined if they had attended any career fairs outside of school. Overall only 46%(n40) of respondents identified that they had attended career fairs and 54%(n47) said they dd not. *(See Appendix I).* This question was correlated with question 4. It identified that 33% (n29) of 5th year and 11% (n10) of TY respondents indicated that they had attended career fairs and 20% (n17) 5th year and 36% (n31) of TY students had not. *(see Chart 4.12).* Furthermore, when we look at the gender breakdown in the two-year groups the data shows that in TY only 3% (n3) of females and 8% (n7) of males have attended career fairs with 15% (n13) of females and 21% (n18) of males not attending. Fifth year shows an increase of participants availing of career fairs for advice and information on third level courses and colleges, with 26% (n23) of females and 8% (n7) of males attending career fairs with 11% (n10) of females and 7% (n6) of males not attending in fifth year. (*See chart 4.13).*

It is noteworthy to highlight that TY students do not appear to be going to career fairs when it might be an optimum time for them to do so. The second part of the question requested respondents to indicate if they found these events useful in planning for future career options. It was answered by 59% (n51) participants, with 69% (n35) indicating it was useful and 31% (n16) that it was not useful. The qualitative responses to question 12 were limited with only13% (n 11) responses. The respondents identified the common themes *of college progression, course requirements and subject usefulness.* Some

respondents reported that this experience "*gave me the chance to ask questions about the course I was interested in*", while another reported that "*it showed me the different routes you can take to get your chosen career*" " I need a European language". However, for one student "*it was information overload that can leave you feeling a bit overwhelmed*". It is apparent from these figures that TY students do not appear to be going to career fairs when it might be an optimum time for them to do so.

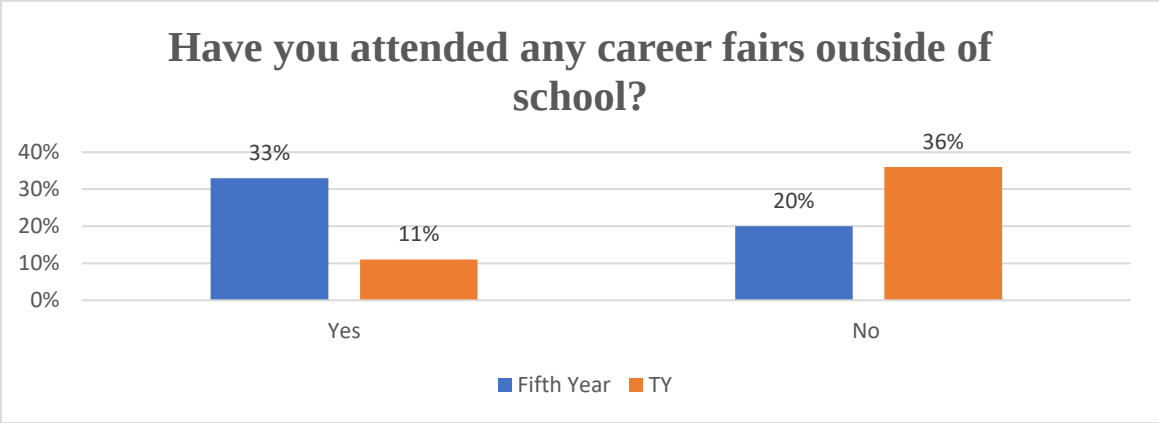


Chart 4.12: Career Fair Attendance

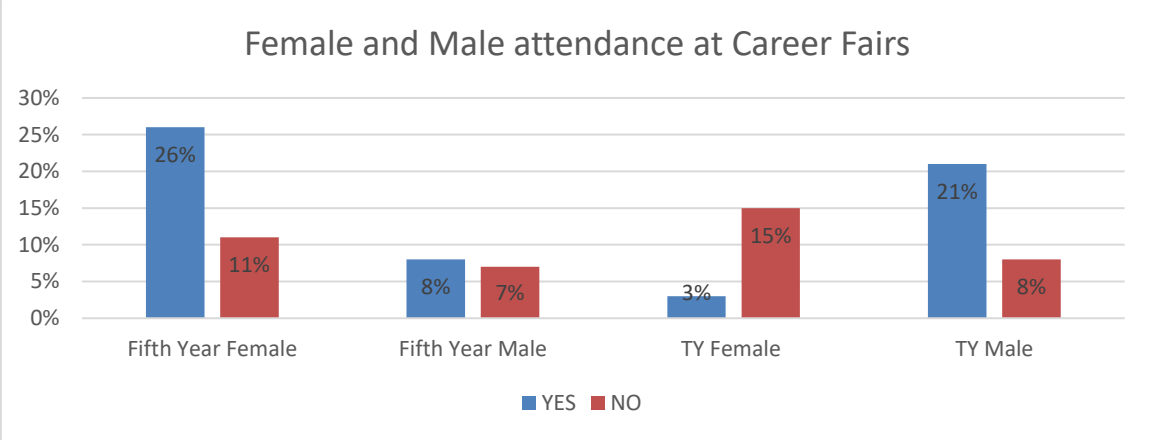


Chart 4.13: Female and Male Attendance at Career Fairs

Question 13 was a nominal open-ended question which sought to find out if participants had attended any third level college open days. The question was answered by 100% (n87) and was correlated with question 1. It identified that 36% (n31) female and 33% (n29) male had attended these open days, and 21% (n18) females and 10% (n9) males did not. (*See Chart 4.14).* Further investigation reveals that a significant number of TY respondents attend third *level college open days compared to fifth year respondents.* The data highlights that in TY that 18% (n16) of females and 25%(n22) of males attend college open days with only 2%(n2) of females and 1% (n1) of males not attending. In Fifth year

14% (n12) of females and 11% (n10) of males attend college open days and 22%(n19) of females and 6% (n5) of males attend college open days. *(See Chart 4.15).*

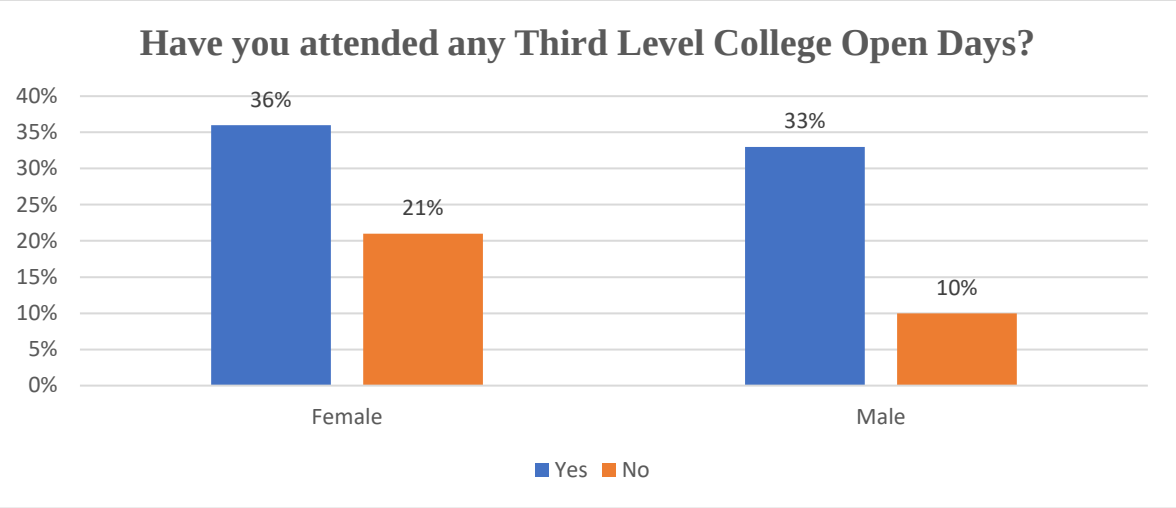


Chart 4.14: Third Level College Open Days

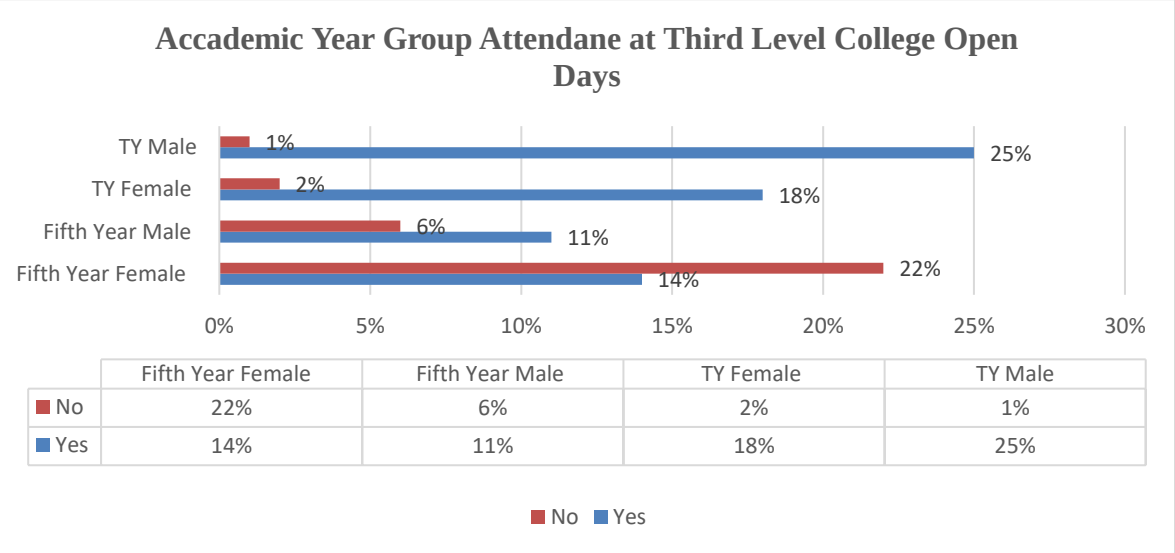


Chart 4.15: Attendance at Third Level College Open Days by TY and Fifth Year Students

Further qualitative data was collected in question 13. Respondents were asked about the usefulness of attending such open days in terms of planning which college to attend. This was answered by 78% (n47). The majority of respondents were satisfied with their selection however, a limited number identified the common themes of insightfulness , resources and beneficial information with responses such as *" yes because you got the chance to sit in on lectures and gain more of an insight into the course you are hoping to do"* and another stated *"yes I found it useful because I got to see what courses each of the*

colleges have and the points needed", " I found out about what subjects and points I need for a particular course", "I got to talk to a student's doing the course I am interested in".

Question 14 was an interval Likert scale question analysed by data disaggregation. This question sought information on the factors involved in choosing a college/ university. The question was answered by 100% (n87). In chorological order of influence 62% (n54) indicated the type of course on offer in the college, which was followed by friends/peers attending the same college at 43% (n38). The location of the college was third at 33% (n29) and the reputation of the college was the fourth highest at 31% (n27). Finally, only 5% (n5) marked N/A throughout. (See Chart 4.16).

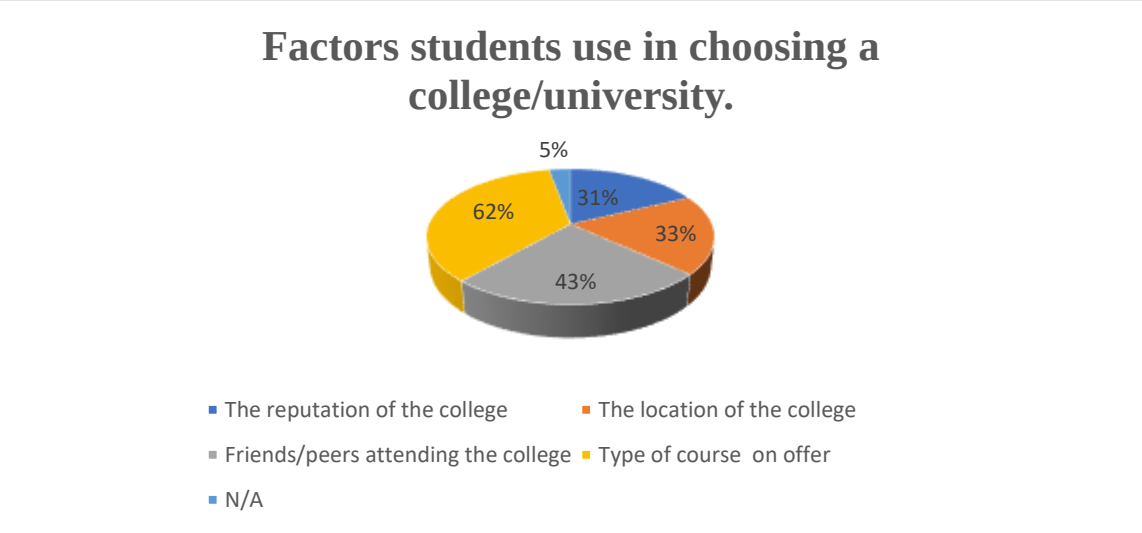


Chart 4.16: College/ University Influencing Factors

4.2.3 Section Three: Subject Choice Decision Making Factors

This section examines the findings from question 15 to 18 which looked at information on subject choice and consisted of open, closed and Likert type questions.

Question 15, an open-ended ordinal question was answered by 100% (n87). It ascertained whether the respondents were aware that their subject choice might affect their future career options after school. A very high percentage 86% (n75) identified that it could impact on their future options, whereas only 14% (n12) identified that it would not have an impact. Of those who answered YES, the respondents were asked to identify who made them aware of this issue. Interestingly those identified in chronological order were

teachers at 36% (n31) with the second highest being guidance counsellors at 20% (n17). Parents were the third highest for 9% (n8) with 3% (n3) of those specifically indicating their mother as the person who made them most aware. The fourth highest at 7% (n6) was themselves and fifth highest at 5% (n4) was information from colleges. Finally, deputy principal, friends and brother/sister were all 1% (n1) as influential for one respondent. *(See Chart 4.17).*

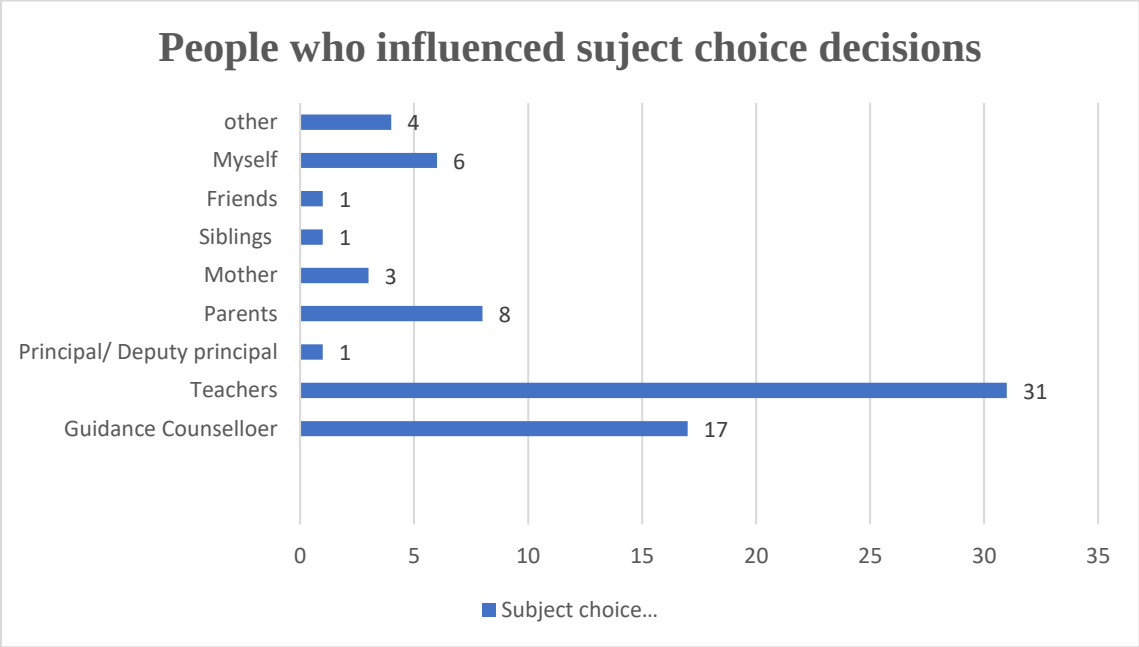
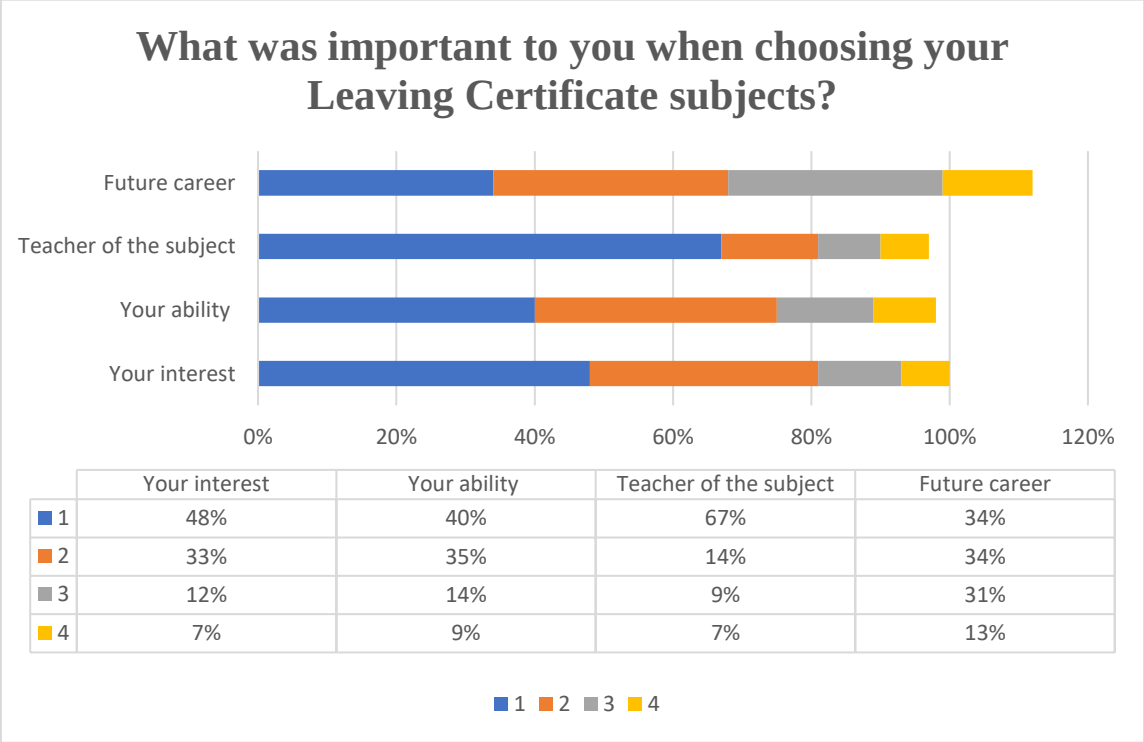


Chart 4.17: Subject Choice Influencers

Question16 examined whether respondents felt they received sufficient advice in making their Leaving Certificate subject choices. This was answered by 100% (n87) with 70% (n61) answering YES indicating that they did receive sufficient advice and 30% (n26) answering No highlighting insufficient information being provided. The second part of the question requested the respondents to explain further why they answered no. In total there was 42%(n11) responses. The themes that emerged included students feeling rushed, not enough information and the beneficial information from the class teacher. Four respondents reported that they felt "rushed "*to make a decision*. Another stated "I *feel I was only given sufficient advice in a few subjects*", with another explaining "I *feel that we should have career classes in first year and learn more about college choices earlier*". One participant highlighted that "*one talk is not enough*". A participant who did receive

information stated that "*teachers explained how subjects benefited certain courses in college*".

Question 17, an interval Likert scale question analysed by data disaggregation and sought information on the most important factor for respondents in choosing a subject for the Leaving Certificate. The question was answered by 99% (n86) of respondents, with 1% (n1) skipping it and 5% (n4) respondents not completing their ranking. Interestingly the top four preferences were "Teacher of the subject" at 67% (n58), "Your interest" was second at 44% (n38), "Your ability" was the third preference at 40% (n34), while "Future career" was fourth at 34% (n29). *(See Chart 4.18.*



	Your interest	Your ability	Teacher of the subject	Future career
1	48%	40%	67%	34%
2	33%	35%	14%	34%
3	12%	14%	9%	31%
4	7%	9%	7%	13%

Chart 4.18: Factors influencing Leaving Certificate Subjects

Question 18 an open-ended question that asked respondents if they were aware that a language is a requirement for some third level college courses in Ireland. This question was answered by 100% (n87) of respondents. In total 89% (n89) of respondents stated YES indicating awareness, while 11% (n10) were not aware of this requirement. *(See Appendix J).*

Question 19 asked respondents if their parents/guardians were given information advising them on their subject choices. This question had a response rate of 99% (n86) with 1% (n1)

skipping it. Interestingly, in total 63% (n54) of respondent's parents were given information on subject choice, with 37% (n32) of parents not receiving any information.

4.2.4 Section Four: Career Guidance

The final section of the questionnaire addressed questions 20 to 23 which sought information on the guidance service, and it consisted of both open and closed questions**.**

Question 20 was an open-ended nominal question analysed by data disaggregation. It was answered by of 99% (n86) of respondents with 1% (n1) skipping it. In total 87% (n75) had timetabled career guidance classes, while 13% (n11) had not. After cross tabulation with question 4 the findings revealed that 41% (n35) of respondents who had received career guidance classes were TY students and 47% (n40) were 5th years. Only 6% (n5) of TY respondents and 7% (n6) did not receive guidance classes in their school. *(See Chart 4.19).* Unfortunately, I did not ask students to elaborate further on this question, so I did not receive an insight into why these students did not receive career guidance classes.

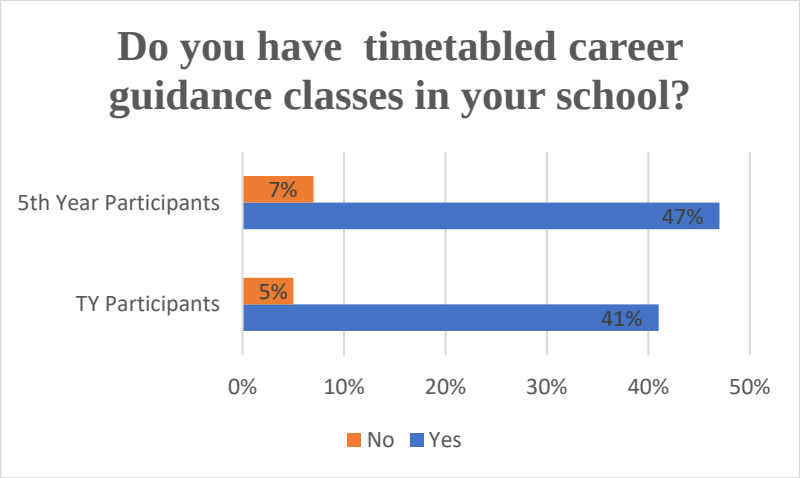


Chart 4.19: Career Guidance Classes

Question 21 was an open-ended nominal question that sought information on whether participants availed of a one to one meeting with the guidance counsellor in relation to their future career decisions. It was answered by 99% (n86) with 1% (n1) skipping this question. Overall, it was found that 65% (n56) of respondents had availed of a one to one meeting but 35% (30) did not avail of one to one meeting with the School Guidance Counsellor. *(See Appendix K).* This question was correlated with question 4, students year group, which highlights that 35% (n30) of TY students and 30% (n26) of 5th year students

availed of a one to one meeting with the guidance counsellor, and 13% (n11) of TY's and 22% (n19) fifth year students had not. *(See Chart 4.20).*

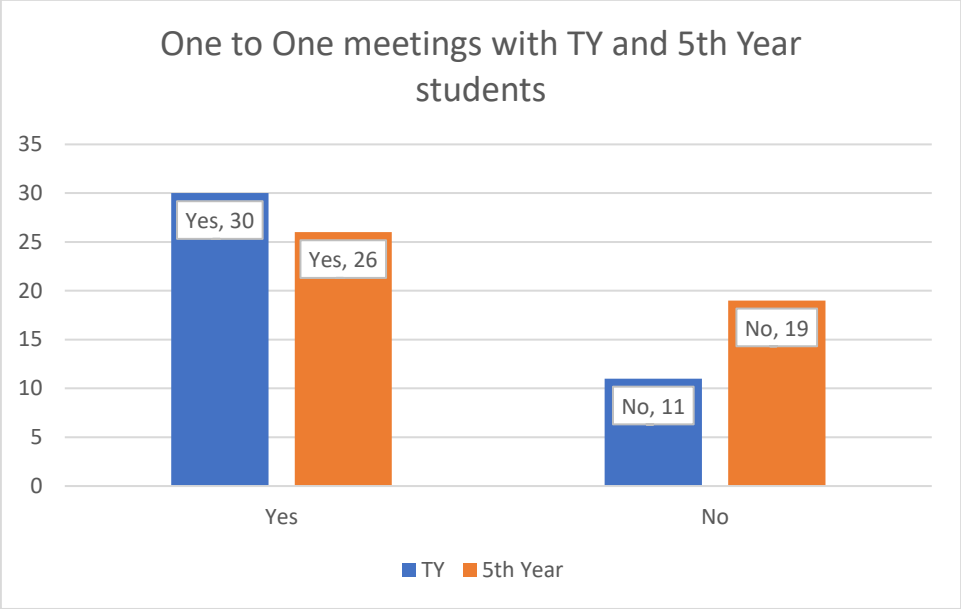


Chart 4.20: One to One meeting with TY and 5th Year students

Question 21 wad further correlated with question 1 which gave the gender breakdown of students availing of one to one meeting with the school guidance counsellor. Of the 65% (n56) of respondents who availed of one to one meeting 37% (n32) were female and 28% (n24) were male. Of the 35% (n30) who did not avail of one to one meeting, 20% (n17) were female and 15% (n13) were male. *(See Chart 4.21)*

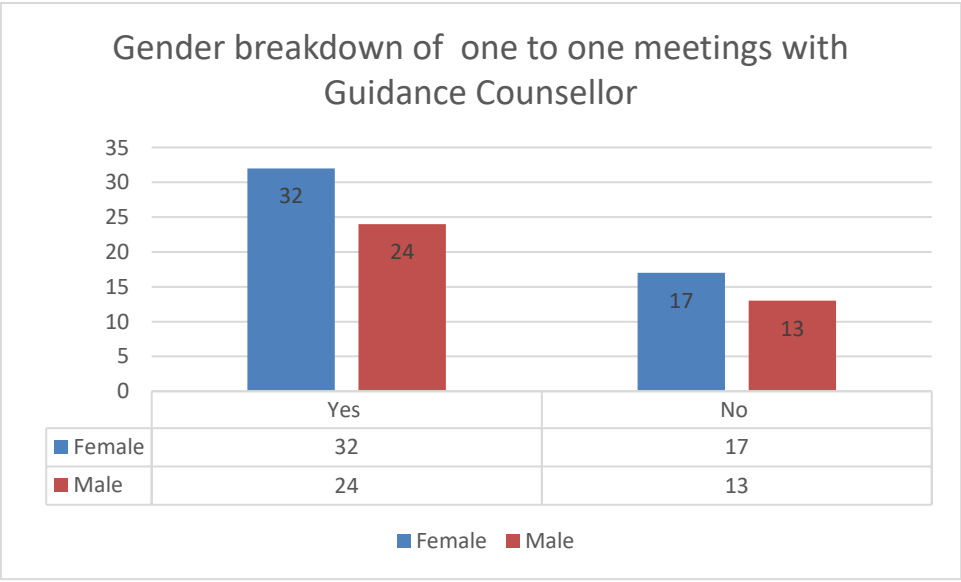


Chart 4.21: Gender breakdown of One to One meetings

The qualitative data from question 21 was answered by 74% (n64) respondents. It enquired if the respondents had found the one to one meeting helpful for their career decision making. Interestingly 56% (n36) of the respondents indicated they had and 44% (n28) had not. The positive themes that emerged from the responses included *exploration, courses and options, insightful, usefulness.* The negative themes were *dismissal and doubt.* For those respondents who found the one to one session helpful, responses included "*made me more determined*", *"explored courses and options available", "easier than filtering through a group", "provided me with useful resources" and "really nice and relates to students".* For those participants who did not find it useful, responses included *"Felt dismissed", "rude and negative about my choices", "left doubting myself".*

Question 22 asked if respondents had they accessed, or would they consider accessing an external private guidance counselling. It was answered by 100% (n87) respondents with 2% (n2) answering more than one of the options. Only 9% (n8) of respondents have attended private guidance counselling with 38% (n33) of respondents acknowledging they would consider accessing it and 38% (n33) of respondents would not consider accessing it and 17% (n15) of respondents acknowledging they would not be able to afford to pay for private guidance counselling. *(See Chart 4.22)*

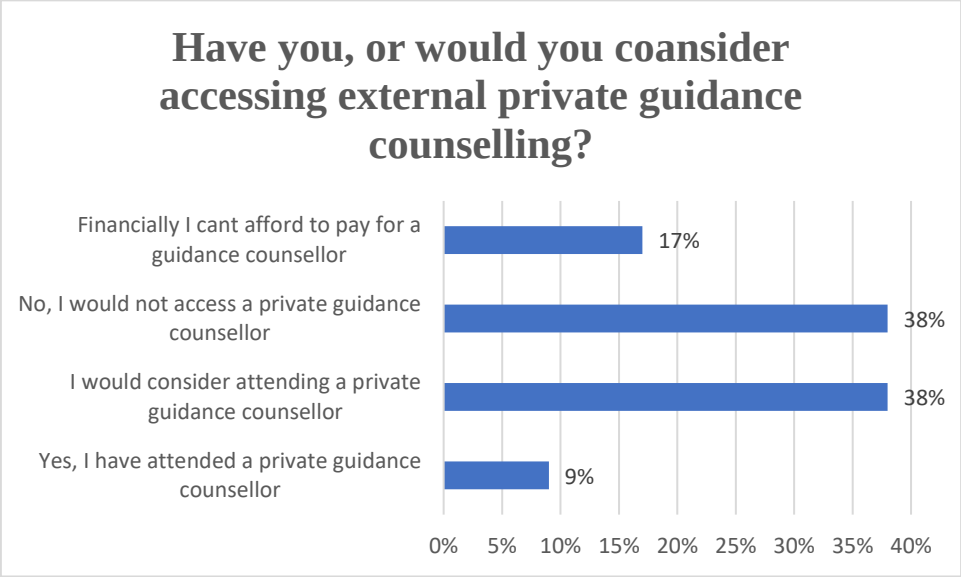


Chart 4.22: Influencing Factors when considering External Private Guidance Counselling.

Finally, Question 23 was on open ended question seeking additional information from respondents on career decision making. It was answered by 45% (n39) of respondents with a high level, 55% (n48) skipping it. Of those respondents who answered this question, 64% (n25) of respondents felt they didn't need to provide any further information. However, 36% (n14) of those who responded the emerging themes included *resources, subject choices and work experience* with responses *such as "there should be more resources and information made available" "the school provides an adequate guidance counselling service, I just haven't availed of it yet", "better option lines for subjects*".

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the online questionnaire. The findings have been presented graphically throughout and various approaches were used to analyse the data.

In chapter five these findings will be critically discussed allowing for synthesis and interpretation with chapter 2, the Literature review.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the primary findings generated by the online questionnaire in the context of the literature review in chapter two.

5.1 Research Questions of the Study

This study and research findings were guided by three research questions:

1 *How do senior cycle students in a DEIS school make future career related decisions?*

2 *Who or what are the key influencer's in Senior Cycle students decision-making process?*

3 *What are the implications for the guidance service providing guidance to Senior Cycle students?*

To explore these three questions the researcher examined the views of fourth- and fifth-year Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school on their decision-making process. The research findings are based on a sample of 120 students with a final response rate of 73% (n87). This is a robust level of response adding confidence to the quality of the data collected (Blaxter et al., 2010). The findings revealed that during a time of growth, development and self-exploration, students use multiple sources in their decision-making process. Students value the views of their parents when it comes to post-secondary school decisions, however other sources can influence their decision-making including guidance counsellors, teachers, and peers. The guidance service within the DEIS school is a whole school approach where the guidance counsellor and staff, with the support of parent's, support students in their decision-making process. Work experience in TY, open days and career events also contribute to student's decision making.

A number of key themes emerged in the study including the career decision making process, participation in the TY programme and the key influencers in decision making both inside and outside school. The research findings have implications for established policy and practice, and this will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.2 Students Career Decision Making Process in a DEIS Post Primary School

This section discusses the key themes that emerged from the first two research questions. Traditionally career related decisions have tended to focus on discrete concepts relevant to individual career behaviour (Patton and McMahon, 2006). Parson's and Holland's (1909) "trait and factor" approach which has heavily influenced career development and guidance counselling, essentially attempted to match people with jobs that would best fit them by measuring their interests, aptitudes and abilities (Sharf, 2010). However, schools have undergone significant changes, adapting to the social realities and nurturing greater independence in students' learning and decision making (NCCA, 2019). Career guidance professionals need to adapt their practices to enable students to understand that there is no 'one size fits all' when planning for their future (Indecon, 2019). Furthermore, in response to the changing nature of work in globalised marketplaces and the impact this has had on decision-making amongst young people, new models are needed that are better suited to 'illuminate the role of career development than traditional matching models' (Bassot, 2012 p.32).

Various studies have examined the career decision making process for young people. A study by Semple et al. (2002) highlights the important influence of parents, Betz (2004) talks about career self-efficacy as part of decision making and Hirschi and Lage (2007) on career choice readiness. In the Irish context, research shows that career decisions are made as part of a complex interaction of school experience, family background and student aspiration (McCoy et al. 2010). Smyth et al., (2011) argue that decisions are influenced by the individual student's attitude and experience of school, the school's approach to career guidance and the extent to which young people themselves research and evaluate different options.

The sample population in the study mirrors contemporary realities in Ireland with 13 different nationalities represented in the sample population in the study. The sample population in the study ranged in age from 15 to 18 years and included TY and fifth year groups. According to Super (1954) this is the optimal time to explore and plan in order to make correct career decisions. As students get older and mature their ability to make career related choices and decisions develops (Sharf, 2010). The students in this study have begun to make significant educational and career related decisions, i.e. 53% are in fifth year, and have already chosen Leaving Certificate subjects. These choices will

influence their potential career paths and options. During this stage the development of the self-concept is an important factor with low self-efficacy leading to students avoiding certain decisions (Betz, 2004). Self-efficacy comes with maturity and enables students to make more informed decisions (Sharf, 2010). Where there is a lack of parental support or where socio economic conditions are difficult the school should offer an environment where students can develop their own identity and increase their academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

Bill Law's DOTS model emphasises the need for students to think critically about careers and college choices building on existing systematic thought processes coupled with feelings. He views career as a narrative which leads to greater understanding of past actions and the impact these have on future outcomes (Law, 2000). In practice students gather information systematically from multiple sources and combine this information with their feelings to reach decisions. The current research elucidates that while students systematically use traditional methods of information sourcing, such as career fairs and college open days, they are increasingly utilising ICT sources with 85% reporting the use of online resources to filter careers information. The use of ICT continues to be a challenge in the provision of guidance but used effectively could provide a better service for clients (CEDEFOP, 2016).

Most students in this study reported that they had reached the final decision on courses and/or colleges taking account of all the various processes available to them. Significantly, 59% of them indicated that they were certain about what they want to do after they finish school, with 85% of them carrying out their own research and only 46% indicating that the career guidance counsellor was a resource. In this and other studies (Smyth et al., 2011) research by students is a key factor and students indicated that college websites are a significant source of information with all colleges now taking advantage of multimedia marketing.

While the traditional systematic approach to information gathering coupled with advances in technology are central to the career decision making process this research shows that certain key influencers also play an important role in the process. The findings are that the most important influencers are parents, followed by peers and then school staff. The role of parents in the findings, whereby 46% of students reported receiving support and advice

from their parents correlates with previous research which has identified that parents and guardians are considered an important influencing factor in the future career choices of their children (Mc Coy et al., 2014; Shiel and Lewis, 1993; Sovet and Metz, 2014). Importantly, parents' educational background and their involvement in education can also be a significant issue in the decision-making process at Senior Cycle (Hornby, 2011). Parents can act as role models for their children, which can have a positive impact on future career decisions (Sharf, 2010).

Direct parental involvement can also impact on grades, test scores, academic achievement, attitude, subject choice, study skills and attendance at guidance information events (Henderson, 1988; Hornby,2011). It is argued that under-educated parents may be "uninterested in or unable to support their children's success in school" (Paratore et al., 2003, p. 106). Parents who have not completed second level education and are from a lower – socioeconomic background may lack the resources and feel ill- equipped to support their children in the decision-making process (Henderson, 1994; Hill et al., 2004). "Regarding the current study it was found that mothers were more educated than fathers with 74% of mothers obtaining a Leaving Certificate compared to 54% of fathers. The findings are that 45% of mothers and 35% of fathers progressed from second level onto third level. This correlated with other research which indicates that mothers are the most helpful source of advice and a key influencer in second level education (Mc Coy et al., 2014). However, many parents may lack the experience of higher education and the correct information to help make informed decisions (Mc Coy et al., 2011). Parents from a lower socio-economic background rely more on information coming from their child with regard post school decisions and tend therefore not to encourage them in any one direction (Smyth et al.,2011).

This study concentrated on Senior Cycle students in a DEIS post primary school. One of the core aims of the DEIS programme is to strengthen and promote parental and family involvement with school partners (DES, 2005a). Research indicates that school engagement is one of the key elements of educational attainment and post school pathways (Iannella and Smyth, 2017) and that families from disadvantaged backgrounds generally are less likely to be involved in their children's education (Hill et al., 2004). According to

McCoy and Byrne (2011) decision making in relation to these post school pathways are influenced by several factors including social and cultural background, the home environment, expectations from home and individuals own preferences and aspirations. Understanding these barriers and resources is important for establishing and maintaining effective communication and collaboration between families and schools especially in the context of less privileged school environments (Hill et al., 2004). Hearne et al., (2016b) report that for parents to support their children with regards to career and education decisions a greater level of engagement is necessary with the school. Increased contact with parents and the provision of information by schools is likely to enhance the ability of parents to support students in this process (Smyth et al., 2011). Parents can become involved with other stakeholders in the school through the whole school model of guidance delivery, which includes not only the guidance counsellor but the Year Heads, Principal and Deputy Principal, HSLO, and SEN coordinator. Interestingly this study found that parents played a key role in influencing career related decisions with 62% of students ranking their parents as their first preference in a career related enquiry more than teachers, peers and career guidance.

However, informal advice and information sourced from parents and family can often contradict advice given in school as part of formal career guidance so in order for it to be effective information sharing should be a collaborative process between interested stakeholders (Mc Coy, 2010). Therefore, there is a need for the guidance service, especially DEIS schools, to engage parents in the decision-making process in Senior Cycle by disseminating information through a range of tools such as text messages, letters, social media and phone calls. Surprisingly though, in this study only 28% of students emphasised the guidance counsellor as the person they would consult about a career related issue after parents, teachers and peers. It is important, therefore, for parents to engage in dialogue with the school and especially the guidance counsellor and organised school guidance events to ensure accuracy of information and a united and collaborative approach in the dissemination of information to students. Active collaboration between parents and school personal can result in better outcomes and decisions for students (Letha, 2013).

Another key influencer that emerged in this study is the student's peer group which correlates with previous research. Crosnoe and Muller (2014) point out that students from a lower socio-economic background can be particularly influenced by their peer group,

especially if that peer group have parents who have a higher socio-economic background. Furthermore, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to have less access to networks that provide career information and are also more likely to draw information from their peer group and/or those they know studying a particular course (McCoy et al, 2014). The current findings indicate that 43% of students are influenced by peers with regards to the colleges they aim to attend in the future. This indicates that a significant number of them are engaging in conversations about future course actions with their peer group and possibly using this information to influence their decisions. Worryingly, the research also highlights that 34% of students would seek the advice of their peers if they have a career related issue before going to the guidance counsellor. As career advisors it is necessary to be aware of the influence of peers in the decision process. The advice from peers can often contradict what a student might wish to do, or the advice given from the guidance counsellor, and this is something that guidance counsellors need to be cognisant of and incorporate into the guidance plan. More specifically this encourages reflexivity by the guidance counsellor to review existing practices and to include a more varied approach to career identification and decision making.

During adolescence students develop the "building blocks for making life choices" which helps with making career decisions (Sharf 2010, p. 225). School management have considerable influence in terms of the subject choice process and options made available to students (Smyth and Darmody, 2009). Therefore, the provision of suitable subject bands is essential for students' future options and if not considered accurately unsuitable subjects can be selected by default (Smyth and McCoy, 2011). Career guidance is an essential service for students and schools are required to provide a guidance service to help students in making effective and appropriate choices form Junior to Senior Cycle (DES, 2005, 2012; NCGE, 2013). Guidance on subject choice can make a significant difference in the educational paths of students (Sultana, 2014) and during this stage the provision of accurate and useful information is essential to make these decisions (Smyth et al., 2011). In this study, 70% (n61) of respondents, found the they received sufficient advice prior to making their Leaving Certificate subject choices. Surprisingly, 30% of students were dissatisfied with the subject choice process due to constraints within the school resulting in the process being too rushed and insufficient information provided to students.

It has been found that teachers are influential in subject choice decisions for Senior Cycle (Smyth et al., 2011). This may be due to the greater contact time they have with students and the emphasis students place on the interaction and relationships with their teachers (Hearne et al., 2016). In this study, 67% of students ranked the teacher of the subject as the primary influencing factor in subject choice. This finding needs to be considered in light of the possibility that students are not considering aptitude or ability for the subject, or their future career decisions when picking subjects for Senior Cycle. There is a need for teachers and school staff to be provided with the necessary training to support students with their subject choice (Sexton,2007; DES,2012). Additionally, it places a greater focus on management and school personnel in their function and role in supporting students through the delivery of the whole school approach to guidance (DES, 2012). Additionally, a greater focus on the allocation of time to guidance counselling provision at Junior Cycle may help in the establishment of stronger student teacher relationships which in turn can shape students' attitudes towards subject choice (Hearne et al., 2016b; Smyth et al., 2011).

The findings also highlight the influencing role that teachers have in guiding students in the career decision making process with 36% of them reporting that their teachers were more influential than the guidance counsellor in identifying that importance of subject choices and the impact these choices have for future decisions. The role and importance of subject teachers is further evidence that career guidance, advice and information is not provided through the career guidance counsellor alone. The findings here seem to indicate that, not only are subject teachers' part of career guidance provision, they play a significant role in the decision-making process with 38% of students reporting they would approach teachers in the school with a career related enquiry. The 2012 Budget changes to the provision of guidance in post primary schools may be a factor in this, with 30% of non-guidance teachers carrying out guidance related work with students (TUI, 2014). Overall since 2012 there has been an erosion of the provision of guidance offered which impacts on the quality of the service provided to students (Hearne et al., 2016).

In addition, participation in the TY programme and especially through engagement in work experience, students can achieve enhanced psychological career maturity which is essential for making decisions and choices (Barnes et al., 2011). In this study 81% of respondents who did work experience felt that it was a positive experience creating a greater self-awareness and a greater understanding of the world of work. This outcome

confirms other research (Clerkin,2016; ISSU,2014: Jeffers,2011), which shows that TY allows students the time to reflect on experiences and gain exposure to situations which enhances them as individuals and enables them to make effective decisions.

An interesting finding in this study is the impact of the TY programme and work experience on students' career decision making. According to Smyth et al., (2016) work experience helps in shaping decisions about future pathways through growth in confidence and maturity. Students have different levels of maturity and as they develop so does their readiness to make decisions (Sharf, 2010). The TY programme promotes the personal, social, vocational and educational development of students (DES, 1993). A large proportion of students (94%) in this study participated in work experience as part of the TY programme. A significant amount (81%) of them found it beneficial in planning for future decisions, giving some a real insight into the world of work and for others confirming their decision to pursue a particular career path. Experiencing the world of work through the TY programme is a reminder to students that learning about their future happens in many different situations and circumstances both within and outside school (Barnes et al., 2011). Work experience is a valuable way in shaping decisions about which pathways to purse both within and after school (Smyth et al., 2016). Most of the students (94%) in this survey participated in work experience with 81% of them reporting that it was beneficial in helping them plan for the future. Taking part in the TY programme may contribute to a student enhanced psychological maturity which is a key element in making educational and life choices (Barnes et al., 2011; ISSU,2014). The benefits of the TY programme are that it allows students time to gain confidence and develop personally socially and emotionally (ISSU, 2014) all of which benefit career decision making (Smyth, 2016).

TY also gives students the opportunity to visit open days, career days and listen to guest speakers from different career backgrounds (ISSU,2014). In this survey students report that the opportunities to attend events such as these were beneficial in planning for future options. More specifically 69% of students reported that they found this experience useful, gaining valuable knowledge and insights into the details required for courses and college options. However, research has shown that not all students utilise events and opportunities like these, lacking focus and preparation (ISSU,2014).

To conclude, this section has discussed the findings related to how Senior Cycle students are making career related decisions as well as the key influencers involved in the process. The findings highlight that students appear to be availing of a range of sources to make their decisions both internally (inside school) and externally (outside of school).The research shows that parents are the most influential, while peers and school staff have a lesser but nevertheless important role. The challenge for students is to navigate the plethora of available options and seek support from knowledgeable individuals in reaching their career choices.

5.3 Guidance Counselling Provision to Support Students' Career Decision Making.

This section discusses the findings relating to the third research question and the implications for the school guidance service in providing career guidance to Senior Cycle students.

Career guidance counselling has an important role in addressing the needs of students in post primary schools as it increases confidence and motivation and prepares students to make effective career decisions (OECD, 2004). The role of the guidance counsellor is to provide personal, educational and vocational guidance to students (DES, 2005; IGC, 2008), and to support transitions into, through and out from education (NCCA, 2019). According to the Education Act 1998 (9c), the provision of guidance counselling is a statutory requirement and each school under its school development plan must develop a whole school guidance plan. Guidance counselling should be provided to all students in a school (DES, 2005; OECD, 2004), equipping students with the necessary skills and information to assist them in the decision-making process.

For many students, especially those from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background, where there is a history of unemployment and/or little experience of higher education, schools may be the only source of career education in relation to further and higher education pathways and training (Haynes et al., 2013). These students are less likely to have consulted with parents and are in greater need of access to professional guidance (Indecon, 2019). Therefore, guidance counsellors are the most significant providers of careers advice to students and their parents and have comprehensive knowledge of courses, assessment and potential progression pathways (Haynes 2013). Although guidance

counsellors appear to be very influential (Mc Coy et al., 2014), the findings of this study contradict this claim with the guidance counsellor being the fourth most influential source of support for 28% of students. This may be attributable to factors such as reduced contact time, dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher, increased workload, school management decisions and support structures (Hearne et al., 2017). Nevertheless, students in this study did report a preference for one to one guidance which correlates with existing literature (Hearne and Galvin, 2014), with 38% of TY students and 31% of 5th year students availing of this opportunity within the school. For these students one to one guidance was helpful in exploring courses and options available to them. Some students even found this experience more beneficial than the group guidance option where they reported they felt under pressure when the exchange of information has to be filtered through the whole group.

The impact of the 2012 Budget which resulted in a reduction of 53.5% in one to one guidance counselling and an increase in academic subject teaching and classroom-based guidance provision needs to be considered in the context of the findings of the current study (Hearne et al., 2016). The capacity of schools to support student's choice of subjects and post- school pathways is likely to have been affected. (Hearne et al., 2017) report that this will have a significant impact on students form disadvantaged backgrounds where advice and support from the school in making career decisions is relied on significantly. With regards to the issue of classroom guidance provision, the findings of this study show that the majority of students in both TY and fifth year do receive classroom guidance with only 6% of TY students and 7% of fifth year students who did not have timetabled guidance classes in their school. However, worryingly, only 35% of TY students and 30% of fifth year students avail of one to one meetings with the school guidance counsellor. It emerged after Budget 2012, that 15% of students did not meet with the guidance counsellor on a one to one basis (IGC,2016). This is a worrying trend as students from disadvantaged backgrounds rely more on the school guidance service than the main student body (Smyth et al., 2011) for accurate information and assistance regarding future options. This further highlights the need for communication between the key stake holders including management, staff, students, and parents about the guidance programme and the services available to students and how they can access these services so that students feel supported at school and at home.

From the findings it is evident that students are using a range of different sources of information when making career related decisions which has implications for guidance provision. This requires a whole school approach to guidance with the Guidance Counsellor and School Management at the centre and other school staff involved in the provision of guidance counselling (Indecon, 2019). The findings from this study indicate that mainstream teachers have an essential role in facilitating students educational and career related decisions through whole school guidance activities that they feel equipped to deliver. Although, 38% of students reported being willing to ask teachers about career related decisions it is unclear if teachers are aware of the influence, they have in encouraging and motivating students' educational and vocational development. While the guidance service and school staff are two of these sources, parents appear to be the most prominent source which has implications for the quality and validity of careers information being provided to students. Fragmented career information may not accurately reflect the type of information that students need to make career decisions (OECD, 2004). However, the DES (2012) recognise the invaluable service provided by Guidance Counsellors and consider that they are the only ones qualified to deliver the necessary service to post primary students. It is essential therefore that the guidance plan makes adequate provision for the delivery of clear concrete authentic information to all stakeholders. Although this study is based in a rural DEIS school the findings could have implications for other types of secondary schools.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the overall findings of this study in the context of the research questions. The study reveals that decisions made at the transition from post primary onwards are the culmination of a much larger process and have many different influences. The findings highlight the multiple organisational and personal factors that influence students at this vital time in their academic career. It is evident that organisational factors such as the type of school attended, decisions made in the school in relation to programme and curriculum provision, and the organisational supports available to students have a significant influence on their career decisions. Several key themes emerged from this study including the importance of the whole school approach to guidance and counselling, the significance of maturity in the decision-making process and the impact of key influencers

on decisions made. The study provides a range of potential indicators for the role of guidance counsellors in the future and illustrates the strength of the service on a one to one basis while highlighting the challenges around the group delivery of advice. The study confirms that a whole school approach with guidance counsellors at the centre of delivery is potentially the best model for the delivery of these services against the backdrop of staffing and financial constraints.

Chapter six will present an overview of the findings, and provide relevant recommendations arising from the findings.

Chapter six: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the main findings of this study in the context of the overall aim and objectives. It presents the strengths and limitations of the study and identifies a number of recommendations informed by the findings. Finally, the chapter will outline and conclude with a reflection on the personal learning of the researcher.

6.1 Overview of the Research Findings

The overall aim of this research was to examine how Senior Cycle students from a rural DEIS school make career related decisions for their future. Four objectives were identified to achieve the overall aim:

1. To examine and review existing literature relevant to Irish post-primary education, policy and practice of guidance counselling in Irish post-primary education and the career decision-making process of Senior Cycle students.

2. To collect and analyse data from fourth- and fifth-year students in a rural DEIS school about their decision-making process through an online questionnaire.

3. To examine the main influencing factors that impact on student's decision making.

4. To report on the research findings and make recommendations for future policy and practice related to guidance counselling in Post Primary schools.

The study highlights that career decisions in adolescence are the culmination of a complex set of interrelated processes and factors (Hirschi et al., 2015). The findings can be categorised into three principle areas: organisational factors, personal or individual factors and external factors. The school environment is central to the impact of organisational factors through the delivery of the guidance plan and support from management and staff. Personal or individual factors are unique to the students and include level of maturity and engagement in the decision-making process. External factors include the wide range of influences that exist in a student's life from parents and socio-economic backgrounds to peers.

Firstly, this study indicates that the type of school attended, programme and curriculum provision, and organisational supports available to students have a significant influence on

their career decisions (Smyth and McCoy, 2011). The importance of the whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hearne et al., 2017), the significance of maturity in the decision-making process and the impact of key influencers have an important influence on decisions made (Hirschi et al., 2015). Secondly, while the traditional systematic approach to information gathering, coupled with advances in ICT, are central to the career decision-making process, this research also highlights the need for greater engagement by students in the guidance service especially in the one to one guidance provision (ACCS et al.2017). Thirdly, this study confirms the important role of key influencers in the career decision-making process and shows that parents are extremely influential (Hill and Taylor, 2004), while peers and school staff have a lesser but important influencing role (Greenbank, 2014). The challenge then for students is to navigate the available options and take advantage of the influencers available in reaching their career choices (Greenbank, 2014).

The study provides a range of potential indicators for the role of guidance counsellors in the future. Guidance counsellors need to be fully aware of how and where students are getting careers related information and that this may not always be reliable information. The study confirms that a whole school approach to guidance counselling is potentially the best model for students against the backdrop of staffing and financial constraints.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Study

One of the key strengths of this study was that the data was collected from one rural DEIS school which was known to the researcher ensuring the quality and **objectivity of the work carried out**. This approach ensured that the researcher was able to receive permission from the gatekeeper and parents with ease which allowed the researcher time to focus on other areas of preparation. Another strength was the use of a positivist (quantitative) method, with a robust sample size (n120), and the use of an online survey which allowed access to the perceptions and attitudes of fourth and fifth-year students in a rural DEIS school (Bryman, 2012). This resulted in a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data being collected in a short time frame. The response rate for the study was (78%) providing a robust data set for analysis with high integrity (Thomas, 2013). There was a good gender balance, a wide selection of nationalities and a cross section of socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.882 achieved

indicates that the reliability of the survey was good. Finally, an additional strength of this study is the utilisation of information to inform future research on how Senior Cycle students from a rural DEIS school make career related decisions. The study identifies the views of students in a DEIS school and can contribute towards career planning and preparation, supports and delivery.

This study has some limitations in terms of the scope of the study, the extent of the sample used, and the lack of qualitative data versus quantitative data. While the study is confined to one DEIS school, greater objectivity could have been achieved if another school was included in the data analysis. A second limitation is related to the focus being on the career decision-making of Senior Cycle students. Since the data collection phase occurred coming up to the Leaving Certificate exams, it was not possible to include sixth year students due to their lack of availability. It is recognised that their inclusion would have increased the sample size and may have provided a more comprehensive picture. Due to time constraints it was not possible to include some of the key influencers in the study, as their role was only established during the analysis of the survey data. Their inclusion may have corroborated the results of the student surveys. The methodology used for the collection of data in this study was quantitative and utilized Survey Monkey because of the efficiency of the platform. Lastly, while some qualitative questions were included in the survey to provide a level of depth, the study may have benefited from additional qualitative data by way of a mixed method approach enabling the researcher to probe deeper on the topic, however, this was beyond the scope of the study.

6.3 Implications of Findings

The findings of this study have potential implications for established policy, practice and research in the area of supporting student's career decision-making process.

6.3.1 Policy Implications

Schools must embrace the Whole School Approach as a policy for the delivery of careers guidance and this approach needs to involve parents in particular, as evidenced by the results of this survey. With regard to established policy there are implications for the Department of Education and Skills, individual schools and staff members within schools.

According to the Education Act (1998) it is the responsibility of schools to ensure equal access to guidance counselling across the diverse range of educational offerings at Senior Cycle including secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools (Government of Ireland, 1998). This challenge is further complicated by the range of Senior Cycle options including TY, LCVP and LCA available to students. The standardized Leaving Certificate remains a high stakes points race with limited opportunities to prepare for independent living and life outside of school (Smyth et al., 2011). Careers guidance policy should be targeted to the specific user group and include the holistic development of students involved (Smyth et al., 2011). This study illustrates that even in a DEIS environment the delivery of career guidance can be fractured based primarily on student's lack of engagement, notwithstanding the additional supports available. The study indicates that career guidance counsellors are not the first point of contact for careers information or support in the decision-making process while acknowledging the benefit of one to one engagement where it occurs (Indecon, 2019). Finally, the DES should review the cuts made to guidance counselling in Budget 2012, thereby enhancing the possibility of students receiving a better service within schools.

6.3.2 Guidance Counselling Practice Implications

In terms of current practice, the study findings have implications for schools, key influencers and students This study confirms a range of established practices when it comes to careers decision-making. For the student, the established practice is to follow instinct or course preference in the first instance, followed by consultation with parents, peers and guidance professionals, in that order. The study shows that students are also independently accessing careers information online and through careers fairs/open days. For schools, the practice is to offer guidance as comprehensively as resources will allow and to involve key stakeholders where possible. The implication of these findings in relation to guidance practice is that there is the potential for a more integrated whole school approach between the school, guidance professionals, students and parents/guardians. A key implication which has arisen from this study is the issue of a blended approach, vis-á-vis students availing of the range of sources identified in this study but specifically engaging with the one to one guidance element to ensure they distil the vast amount of careers information they source. The challenge therefore is to provide the best service possible to students.

6.3.2 Research Implications

This study highlights a number of potential research opportunities in relation to the whole school approach to guidance counselling, the role of key influencers and the impact of technology and social media on the decision-making process. Due to the limitations of this study it was not possible to explore the potential impact of a whole school approach to guidance counselling on the students' decision-making process. The study illustrates the important role of parents as key influencers in particular. There are limited supports for parents in this role therefore more research is needed with this stakeholder group. Furthermore, to expand the study across DEIS, Non- DEIS, rural and urban setting would give a more comprehensive analysis thereby benefiting the career decision-making process.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study a number of recommendations based on policy and practice can be made as follows:

1. Provide specific guidance to students in TY regarding subject choice and their implications for future careers decisions.

2. Develop a careers module for TY to be delivered by stakeholders, including guidance counsellors, subject teachers, and external professionals offering advice and support to students making future decisions. This ensures consistency in the delivery of information.

3. Provide information for parents in the context of the whole school approach to include career guidance and course applications processes.

4. The effectiveness of the decision-making process and supports at Senior Cycle needs regular evaluation to ensure its effectiveness. This information could be gathered from all parties, students, parents, staff, management.

5. Develop the whole school approach to embrace careers guidance across all subjects and year groups. Mainstream teachers involved in offering guidance and support to students should receive further training to support students.

6. Examine the use and effectiveness of ICT in the delivery of guidance and inform parents of its benefits. This further ensures accurate information is provided to students in the decision-making process.

6.4 Personal Learning and Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves the researcher continually reviewing their practice to ensure that students are prepared for the changing world they live in (Barnes et al., 2011). Researchers are encouraged to speak about themselves and their experiences while carrying out research (Hearne, 2013). I came to this research study with assumptions about this topic based on my own experience as a teacher and career options coordinator in a DEIS school. On many occasions I engaged in conversations with students about their future and career decisions throughout my role as HSCL coordinator and parents would have highlighted to me frustrations they experienced due to their lack of knowledge about the decision-making process. I found myself questioning the level of assistance and advice available to students and their parents in Senior Cycle. Against the backdrop of a diminished guidance service over the last decade, especially Post Budget 2012, I was privileged to work with a very committed and organised guidance counsellor, from whom I learnt a lot. The guidance counsellor would frequently highlight the increased workload and pressures experienced and as a teacher of 25 years I have seen first-hand the increased social issues and challenges experienced by students and their families. It was an immense personal challenge to embark on this study as a mature student requiring the rebalancing of work, life and family life. The commitment to the delivery of the research required a fundamental reset in terms of organization, application and execution of the component parts on schedule to the standard required.

Finally, what I have learned from researching this topic is that as a future guidance counsellor, I will need to employ the support of management and staff in the delivery of an effective guidance plan. I will need to engage greater involvement from parents in guidance-based activities such as information, advice and supports.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the overall findings, strengths and limitations of this study. It looks at the implications of the study for policy, practice and research and makes specific recommendations arising from the research carried out. Finally, the chapter concludes with the researcher's reflections on her personal learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

UNIVERSITY
***of* LIMERICK**

OLLSCOIL LUIM
NIGH

Subject Information Letter (Principal)

EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS

3rd April 2019

Research Title: An investigation of the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school.

Dear Principal,

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. I am undertaking a research dissertation into the Career Decision Making Process of senior cycle students as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to investigate the factors that influence students' course and college choices in a rural post primary school. In order to gather this information, I would appreciate if you would give me consent to carry out the research study in your school. This would involve me disseminating an online questionnaire on the topic to fourth- and fifth-year students, whom I do not teach or assess, using the online tool Survey Monkey. The

questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete and students will complete it in their own time.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the completion of the online questionnaire. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. The data will be subsequently destroyed according to UL guidelines. It is important to note that the school's identity and that of the individual participants in the online questionnaire will not be used in the research.

If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Ruth Carney

Research Supervisor/s: Dr Lucy Hearne

Tel. No. 061202931
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (**2019_03_21_EHS).** If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS Faculty Office
University
of Limerick
Tel (061)
234101

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix B

UNIVERSITY *of*

LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Consent Form (Principal)

EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS

Research Title: An investigation of the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school.

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. I understand that the identity of the participants and the school will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study.
3. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to completion of the online questionnaire.

I hereby give my consent for Ruth Carney to carry out her research in this school

Signature:_____

Printed name:_____

Signature of Researcher:_____

Date:_____

Appendix C.

UNIVERSITY *of*

LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter (Parent/Carer/Guardian)

Date:

EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS

Research Title: An investigation of the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school.

Dear Parent /Carer/Guardian

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr Lucy Hearne. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to investigate how Senior Cycle students from a DEIS school make career related decisions. I am writing to you to enquire whether you would be willing to consent to your son/daughter taking part in my research study. Volunteer students will be asked to complete an online questionnaire, which will take approximately 20 minutes and be completed in their own free time. All information gathered from the questionnaire data will be held in the strictest of confidence.

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the completion of the online questionnaire. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick and will be destroyed according to UL guidelines. It is important to note that the school's identity and the identity of the individual participants will not be used in the research. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you are agreeable to your son/daughter participating in this research study, please confirm your consent by completing the attached Consent Form and returning it by **Friday May 12th, 2019** to me at Davitt College. A signed copy of this form must be received in advance of the completion of the questionnaire in order for your son/daughter to participate.

If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Ruth Carney
School Tel. 0949023060
Email: 17126037@student mail.ul.ie

Research Supervisor: Dr Lucy Hearne
Tel. No. 061202931
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

_____

Researcher

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (**2019_03_21_EHS).** If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
EHS Faculty Office
University of
Limerick Tel (061)
234101

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Consent Form (Parent/Carer/Guardian)

EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS

Research Title: An investigation of the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school.

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research study. I understand that the following conditions are designed to protect the privacy of all participants and to respect their contributions:

(i) Participation is entirely voluntary. Even if I consent to my child taking part, he/she still has the right to refuse to take part.
(i) All participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process prior to the completion of the online questionnaire.
(ii) The questionnaire data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research team.
(iii) While excerpts from the questionnaire data may be made part of the final research report, under no circumstances will any names of students nor the school, nor any identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I hereby consent to my son/daughter taking part in this research study in the form of an online questionnaire.

Name: ……..

Students Name and School Year group …….

Signature…….

Researcher's Signature……Date……

Appendix E

Subject Information Sheet (Student)

Date: 3/4/2019

EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS

Research Title: An investigation of the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school.

Dear Student,

As part of my MA programme in the University of Limerick, I am carrying a research study and invite you take part in it.

What is the research about?

In my research I aim to investigate how Senior Cycle students from a DEIS school make career related decisions.

What will I have to do?

I would like to invite you to volunteer as a participant for my research study through the completion of an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes of your time and you can complete it in your own time.

What are the benefits?

Results from the survey will primarily indicate who the key influencers are in the career decision making process and secondly the implications for the guidance service providing guidance to students.

What are the risks?

You might decide that you don't want to answer some or all of the questions in the questionnaire. If this happens, you do not have to answer any question you do not wish to.

What if I do not want to take part?

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the completion and submission of the survey.

What happens to the information?

The information that is collected will be kept private and stored securely and safely on the researchers' computer. Your name will not appear on any information. The information that is gathered in the study will be kept for seven years. After this time, it will be destroyed.

Who else is taking part?

Students in 4th and 5th year from your school will be invited to take part in the research.

What if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely event that something goes wrong during the completion of the questionnaire, the session should be suspended and brought to the attention of the Researcher Ruth Carney.

What happens at the end of the study?

At the end of the study the information will be used to present results. The information will be completely anonymous. No student's name appears in any of the results. All data gathered from the research will be stored securely and safely in the researcher's office in UL and destroyed according to UL guidelines on storage. Information that is stored on computer will be password protected.

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact either of the researchers. It is important that you feel that all your questions have been answered.

What happens if I change my mind during the research?

If you feel that you want to stop taking part in the research, you are free to do so and take no further part in it up to the submission of the survey online. There are no consequences for changing your mind about being in the study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Researcher
Ruth Kearney

Research Supervisor: Dr Lucy Hearne
Tel. No. 061202931
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This r

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee **EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS).** If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel (061) 234101

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix F

UNIVERSITY *of*
LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Online Questionnaire Information Email

EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS

Research Title: An investigation of the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school.

Dear Student

I would like to invite you take part in my research study. I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne.

In my research, I aim to investigate the factors that influence students in their career decision-making process in a DEIS secondary school. The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes of your time and needs to be completed by (17 May 2019*).* Please click

[] to continue.

All information gathered in the questionnaire will be held in the strictest of confidence. Participation in this study is voluntary and the decision of the participants will be respected. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated

through professional publication. The collected data will be stored in a secure location in the University of Limerick.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Ruth Carney

Research Supervisor/s: Dr Lucy Hearne
Tel. No. 061202931
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research study has been approved by the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (**EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS).** If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS Faculty Office

University of Limerick Tel (061) 234101

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix G

UNIVERSITY *of*
LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

EHSREC No: 2019_03_21_EHS

Research Title: An investigation of the career decision making process of Senior Cycle students in a rural DEIS school.

Online Questionnaire (for Survey Monkey)

I appreciate you taking the time to complete this questionnaire. It should take approximately 20 minutes. Your responses are voluntary and confidential. Please answer all of the questions in all of the sections.

Please tick to consent to take part in this study ☐

Section 1: General Information

1 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. What is your age?

- 15

- 16
- 17
- 18

3. What nationality are you?

_____

_____

4. What year are you in?

- Fourth (Transition) year
- Fifth year

5. Please tick the appropriate answer in the column that are applicable to you:

		Yes	No	Don't Know	Not applicable
a	Has your father completed the Leaving Certificate?				
b	Has your father completed a 3rd level college course?				
c	Has your mother completed the Leaving Certificate				
d	Has your mother completed a 3rd level college course?				
e	Has your brother/sister completed the Leaving Certificate				
f	Has your brother/sister completed a 3rd level college course?				

Section 2: Information on Career Decision Making

6. How certain are you about what you want to do after you finish school?

- Very certain
- Certain
- Uncertain

7. Do you intend going to a third level institution (university / college) after you leave school?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

If **no**, tick which **one** of the following you intend doing after you leave school?

- Apprenticeship
- Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course
- Getting a job
- Other (please specify below)

_____
_____
_____

8. In the table below, please rank 1-5 **(1 meaning the most important person/s and 5 meaning the least important person/s)** who you would talk to about a career related enquiry?

Parents / Guardian	
Teachers/Tutor	
School Guidance Counsellor	
Friends/Peers	
Other (please explain below)	

_____
_____
_____

9. Have you carried out a career assessment exercise to help you evaluate your interests and aptitudes?

- Yes
- No

If **yes**, please tick the type you have used:

- CAT/ DAT Test
- Career Interest Inventory
- Cambridge Profile Test
- Other (please specify below)

_____
_____
_____

10. Have you carried out any research on a career area of interest to you?

- Yes
- No

If **yes,** which of these resources have you used in your research?

- Online (Careers Portal/ Qualifax)
- Guidance Counsellor
- Parents/ Guardian
- Teachers
- Other (please specify below)

_____
_____
_____

11. Did you do work experience as part of the Transition Year programme?

- Yes
- No

If **yes**, how useful was it in planning for your future career options?

- Very useful
- Useful
- Not useful

Please explain further:

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. Have you attended any career fairs outside of the school?

- Yes
- No

If **yes,** did you find this useful in planning for your future career options?

- Yes
- No

Please explain further:

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. Have you attended any third level college (IT/University) open days?

- Yes
- No

If **yes** did you find this useful in planning which college, you might like to attend?

- Yes
- No

Please explain further:

_____
_____
_____
_____

14. If you intend going to third level college in the future, rank 1-5 **(1 being the most influential and 5 being the least influential)** the factors which you will use in choosing a college/university?

The reputation of the college	
The location of the college	
Friends/ peers attending the college	
Type of courses on offer	
Other (please explain below)	

_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 3: Subject Choices Decision Making Factors

15. Were you aware that your subject choice might affect your future career options after school?

- Yes
- No

If **Yes**, who made you aware of this?

_____
_____

16. In general, do you feel you received sufficient advice prior to making your decision for your Leaving Certificate subjects?

- Yes
- No

If **no,** please explain further:

_____
_____

17. In the table below, please rank 1 – 4 **(1 meaning the most important and 4 meaning the least important)** that was important to you when choosing your Leaving Certificate subjects.

Your interest	
Your ability	
Teacher of the subject	
Future career	

18. Were you aware that a European language is a requirement for some third level college courses in Ireland?

- Yes
- No

19. Were your parents/ guardians given information advising them on your subject choices?

- Yes
- No

Section 4: Career Guidance

20. Do you have timetabled career guidance classes in your school?

- Yes
- No

21. Have you availed of individual one to one meeting with the school Guidance Counsellor in relation to your future career decisions?

- Yes
- No

If **yes,** did you find the one to one session helpful for your career decision making?

- Yes
- No

Please explain why:

_____
_____
_____
_____

22. Have you accessed, or would you consider accessing external private guidance counselling?

Please tick from the following:

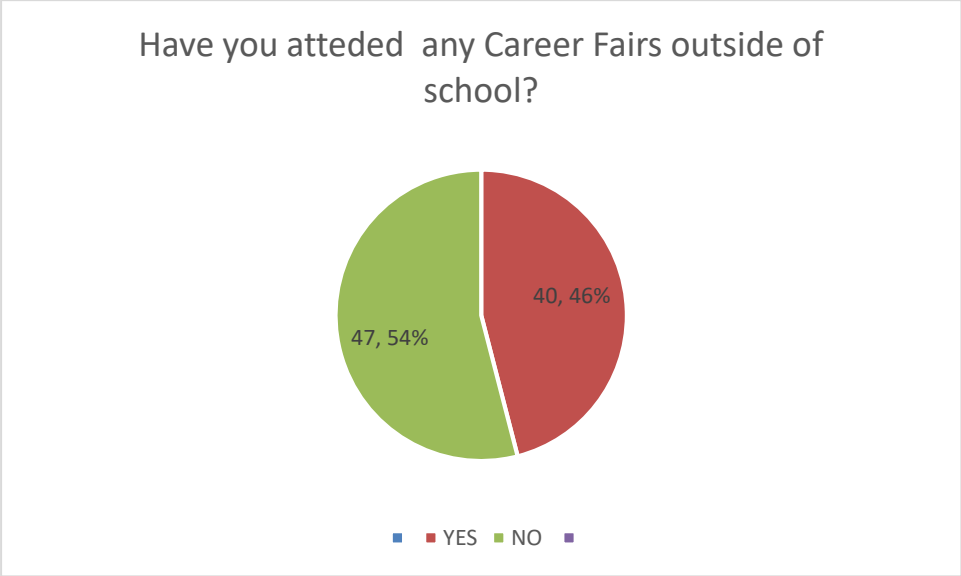
- Yes, I have attended a private guidance counsellor
- I would consider attending a private guidance counsellor
- No, I would not access a privately guidance counsellor
- Financially I can't afford to pay for a guidance counsellor.

23. Is there any other information you would like to provide about your general experience of career decision making for your future?

_____
_____
_____
_____

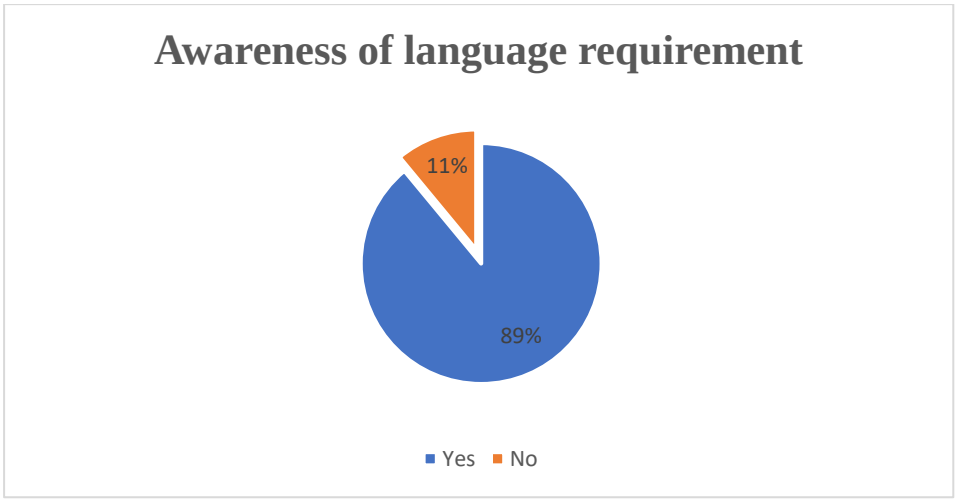
Thank you for taking the time to complete this online questionnaire. If you feel that you need to discuss any issues that may have arisen from completing it, you are advised to contact the school guidance service for an appointment.

Appendix I



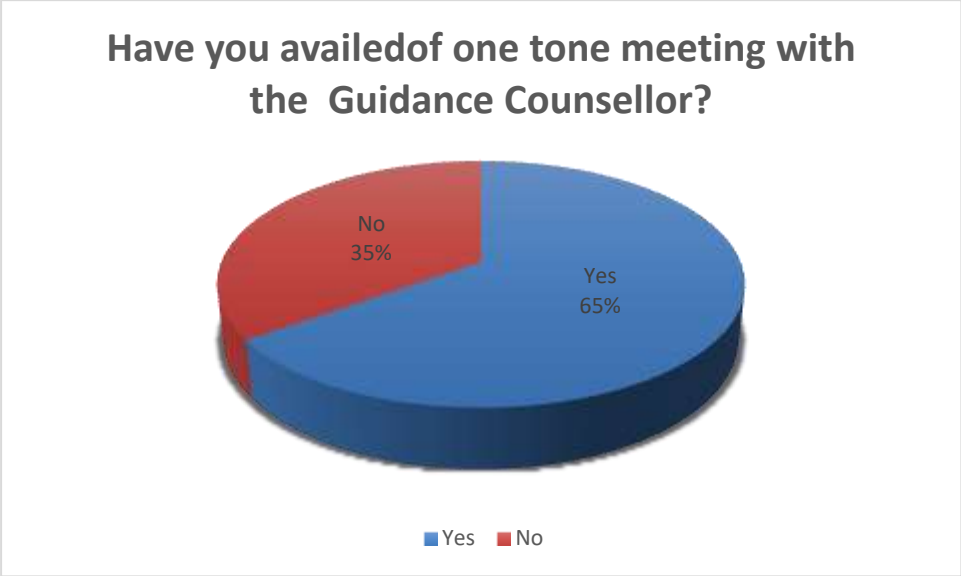
Career Fair Attendance

Appendix J



Awareness of language requirement

Appendix K



One to One Meeting with Guidance Counsellor